Shamelessness
Revenge
Prayer
Fidelity

FOUR BIBLE STUDIES

SHAMELESSNESS

REVENGE

PRAYER

FIDELITY

BY

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PREFACE.

It is with great diffidence, in view of the unbroken accord in interpretation of the long line of expositors hitherto, that three of these studies are now offered as new and better exegeses of three of the parables of our Lord. If from these, under guidance of the Spirit, some of the deep things of God shall appear as more easily to be fathomed, or if any suggestion has been furnished tending to clearer apprehension of the passages treated of, the purpose of this publication will have been fully answered. For, in our daily search of the Scriptures, as in the daily test of our inner spiritual life, the constant and reverent inquiry ever should be, whether these things are so? and in both cases, not counting ourselves to have yet fully apprehended, the faithful endeavour should be to reach forward to the things that are before.

It will be seen that, as the parables discussed in the first two studies both bear upon two different phases of the subject of prayer, the third study would naturally follow them, in order that the three together might set forth a more full and comprehensive (though by no means an exhaustive) treatment of the whole subject of prayer.

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CONTENTS.

SHAMELESSNESS.

LUKE XI. 1–10.

THE interpretation of this parable, The Friend at Midnight, now generally accepted, is: that the host, who, after receiving his travelling friend at midnight, goes to his neighbour's house to ask for food, represents the praying disciple; and the householder roused up by him represents our Heavenly Father; but interpreters are careful to state that there is a difference as to the *methods* of representation in these two portions of the parable; the host, as he asks for bread is like unto and stands for the praying Christian; but the householder is not like our Heavenly Father. In the case of the host, the lesson is said to be given by way of likeness, but in the other case it is said to be given by way of contrast. It is allowed that the neighbour is like God in giving "as many loaves as he needeth," but that he is unlike Him in the exhibition of a morose and crabbed nature.

Here we make the first issue and claim that it is not according to the functions of a parable, nor a legitimate exercise of its true methods, to teach by contrast or dissimilarity, but always by likeness or similarity. It is a *παραβολη*, a "casting alongside" the objects or truths to be illustrated, the objects that are to effect and make clear such illustration. The attributes and qualities of the divine

and spiritual are to be set forth and explained by natural objects in which there are qualities, functions, and sometimes attributes bearing a likeness, ethically, to the objects, persons, or truths of a spiritual nature. "Know ye not this parable, and how, then, will ye know all parables?" was the reply of our Lord when asked for a solution of the parable of The Sower; as if the interpretation and application of a parable were so plain and easy that every one having ears to hear and eyes to see might understand it in its several parts, and might readily know to what truth or object each part was intended to refer by reason of its spiritual or ethical likeness to that truth or object.

Thereupon Jesus gives the explanation of the parable. The sower is the Son of Man, the seed is the Word of God, the fowls by the wayside represent Satan taking away the seed so it might not bear fruit; the stony places are the stony hearts whereon the seed taking root will flourish for a short time and then be scorched up in the heat of tribulation and persecution; the thorns that choke and render unfruitful the Word are the cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches, and lusts of other things; the good ground is the good and honest heart, that nourishes the good seed until it brings forth most bountifully. In this exegesis given by our Lord there is a plain, direct, and self-evident likeness between each truth to be illustrated and the object in nature that illustrates it. The sower is "placed alongside" the Son of Man, and a likeness appears at once; He is in action perfectly and directly represented by the sower; so also, when

the fowls of the air are "placed alongside" Satan, the likeness in action is easily apparent, and there is no dissimilarity or contrast between them. This same line of remark will apply to the other members of the parable, the stony ground, the thorny, and the good ground.

Thus is the true nature of every parable set forth by Jesus Himself; always illustrating by similarity, never by contrast; always by likeness, never by unlikeness. Another fine example of this method is given by the Lord in His explanation of "The Tares of the Field" (Matt. xiii. 37–43). There the sower, the good seed, the field, the enemy, the harvest, and the reapers, all and each, stand for character in persons, or qualities in things, of the kingdom of God, and the acts of the persons and the results following the operations in the harvest field of nature are types and emblems of similar acts and results in the spiritual and heavenly world. Thus every parable must, by virtue of its very constitution as a parable, operate on direct lines, and offer and bring out all its lessons on points of agreement, and not of difference. So was it in all other parables uttered by our Master; the kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed; is like unto leaven hid in meal; is like unto treasure hid in a field; is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; is like unto a man that is an householder; is like unto a certain king who made a marriage for his son; is like unto ten virgins; is as a man travelling in a far country. In fact, the only two parables that have ever been made by expositors to teach thus wrongfully by contrast and

unlikeness are this one and that of the Unjust Judge.

It cannot therefore be admitted that the neighbour in this parable can represent our Father by contrast, but he must represent Him by similarity; and the qualities in the character of the neighbour and his acts must and do, for the purposes of the parable, set forth like qualities and stand for similar actions, the outcome of the purposes and plans of our Heavenly Father. If, at this point, the devout reader is ready to lay down this paper and exclaim, "Surely God is not the crabbed, morose, and unlovely character personated in the neighbour," we can say in reply, "Have patience, and we may perhaps help you to see that the neighbour is not of such character at all."

Taking up now the second issue on which we differ and dissent from the received exposition of the parable, in all the exegeses there is one proposition not expressed in terms, but always tacitly assumed and taken for granted; and out of this proposition, falsely assumed as a fact, and which we will show to have no reasonable basis, has been developed the false and unnatural interpretation commonly accepted as the only valid one. That assumed proposition is that the traveller, arriving at midnight, was hungry and needed food, or that it was best and proper for him, whether hungry or not, to take food at that hour before lying down to rest till morning. But there is nothing to show that he was hungry, for the natural presumption is that he took his evening meal at the regular hour before starting on his

journey; he makes no plea of hunger and does not ask for bread; yet, even if hungry, would it have been conducive to his health or comfort to take a meal at the midnight hour?

The physical constitution of man is the same in all ages; we may therefore ask the question of ourselves as appropriate for the solution of this case, What would I do on arriving at my destination, having before the start taken the usual evening meal, and then travelling by rail or stage till midnight? I have put such a question to physicians and commercial travellers, and they, speaking the one from knowledge of physiology and the other from practical experience, all agreed that the sensible and healthful part for the traveller would be to go to bed, whether hungry or not, without taking food; the physician would say that the stomach, having digested the evening meal, should be allowed its usual rest during the remaining hours of the night, that if roused and compelled to further action, it must call upon the brain for an unwonted supply of nerve force, and the brain, thus kept active, cannot get the rest it should have in sleep; the commercial traveller confirms this by his statement that food taken at that unseasonable hour keeps him tossing and restless all the remaining hours of the night, so that morning finds him worn out and unrefreshed. We must, then, consider as altogether unfounded the assumption that, even by an overstrained rule of hospitality, the traveller should properly have had anything offered him at that time.

A volume lately published by Canon H. B. Tris-

tam, entitled "Eastern Customs in Bible Lands," furnishes, in a chapter headed "Journeying in the East," some very useful information on this point: "The requisites for an Eastern journey are few and simple—scrip, purse, and shoes; though now, when the country is not under the settled rule which prevailed in the days of the Romans, a weapon of some kind or at least a stout cudgel must be added. The equipment was the same many ages before that period: for Homer (Odyssey, 17—197) describes Ulysses as travelling with a purse, a bag, and a staff, using the same word for scrip or bag which occurs in the New Testament. The purse is a small leather bag hung round the neck, under the shirt, by country folk, but concealed in the folds of the voluminous girdle worn by townsmen. It contains the owner's money and other valuables, especially the signet ring so treasured by every Arab, who always carries it in this purse. The scrip is a bag of larger dimensions, slung across the shoulder over the outer garment, generally made of leather, but, in the case of the poorest, of flexible matting, in which provision for the journey, usually olives, dried figs, and thin barley cakes, rolled up or folded square, is carried."

It is thus clear that this traveller in our parable is to be regarded as already, and before his arrival at the house of his host, provided with any needed loaves contained in the "scrip" he carried. There is no intimation that he was furnished differently or with aught less than what travellers were accustomed to carry with them; nor are we to take it for granted that the fact of the host asking the

neighbour for bread, of itself implied the absence of that article from the traveller's scrip. Our Lord sets forth this man, the traveller, and in fact all the characters in all His parables, as acting under natural motives and according to the ordinary condition and mode of life of each of them.*

We can now see that the host develops a character entirely different from that usually accorded him; for it turns out that the request he made of the neighbour for the loaves was not a reasonable one for a necessary article, but the very opposite. The question therefore arises, Why should the host do so unreasonable and unnecessary an act, and what was his motive in doing it? The answer is ready at hand in the one word that characterizes his action, *ἀναιδίαν*, shamelessness; for it was no motive of benevolence that led him to the neighbour's house, but a vain wish to make for himself a certain kind of reputation with the guest and his neighbour and any others who would be sure to hear of the act he now proposed.

Hospitality was accounted as one of the cardinal and almost saving virtues of his time and his people; he would make a great show of zeal in fulfilling its duties on any occasion that might offer; so he goes with ostentatious and inconsiderate

* In the exposition of this parable by the *Sunday School Times*, in its issue of February 29, 1896, the following note is contributed by Rev. William Ewing: "Now the laws of (Eastern) hospitality lay it down that he who arrives after sunset may be sent to sleep without supper; that is to say, arriving at midnight, he had a right to *shelter*, but none to *food*. So this man acted within the understanding of hospitable duty in refusing to be disturbed at that hour of the night."

eagerness to the neighbour, regardless of the fact that he is asking for what is not at all needed, and reckless also of the outrage he is committing against all the kindly and considerate feelings of his neighbour. He had no plea of hunger from the traveller to urge; so the only reason he can give is one that relates to himself. "I have nothing to set before him"; it is the superserviceable "setting before" that constitutes his real motive, and not any desire to do his travelling friend a benefit; he would have all the world know how zealous he is to fulfil the duties of a host at all times, even at the midnight hour. "I have nothing to set before him" is the specious reason given for the demand, and it is left to the friend to infer, what the man would not declare outright, that there is a real need for the three loaves. Very clearly this man was of that blatant, shallow-minded sort, not sparsely met with in Oriental lands, who are ever thrusting forward their fine virtues and moral attainments "to be seen of men"; they are constantly bringing them to the front on dress parade, and are seemingly haunted by the fear that all the good traits of their character will be, by the mass of men, overlooked and forgotten.

The neighbour, however, is not moved by the appeal; he may suspect it has no genuine basis, but at least he knows his friend of old, and understands his reckless spirit and brazen ways; he gives at first a prompt refusal; a request perfectly reasonable at a reasonable hour deserves no attention, no consideration now; no plea of a benevolent motive has been made to him, and this display of

shamelessness by his friend calls for no act of benevolence or good-will in return; it is quite proper for him to return a selfish response to the selfish request, *Μή μοι κόπους πάρεχε,* "Do not bring troubles upon me." The rendering in the Authorized and Revised versions of these four Greek words by the three English words "trouble me not," is a very inadequate translation; this phrase, *κόπον παρέχειν,* is thus mistranslated not only in this parable and that of the Unjust Judge, but also at Matt. xxvi. 10 and at Galatians vi. 17; in Matthew, our Lord in rebuke of the unjust criticisms spoken against that Mary who poured the ointment on His feet, exclaimed, "Why do you bring trouble upon the woman?" in anticipation of the wrong and wicked slanders that might be sent forth about her from envious tongues, to injure her good name and cast a cloud upon her fair character; these were the "troubles" such words as they had spoken would "bring upon" her, and He then and there interposed in her behalf, declaring that the account of this act of hers should form part of the imperishable record of His own life, and thus the memory of it would be preserved to the remotest ages of the world.

Paul's adjuration in his letter to the Galatians, *Τοῦ λοιποῦ κόπους μοι μηδεὶς παρεχέτω,* was made in view of the questions about circumcision that had come up, and troubled the disciples while he was staying in Antioch, Lystra, and Derbe, as they are stated in Acts xv. and xvi.; so, in writing to the Galatians, he admonishes them of the futility of such questions, raised as they are by

those who "desire to make a fair show in the flesh" and that they may escape "persecution for the cross of Christ." Circumcision is nothing, but a newly created mind and heart are everything; these zealots for outward conformity do not keep the law; their only glory is in the numbers of their followers; but Paul's glory is in that symbol of shame, the Cross; let no man now wantonly attempt to bring troubles any more upon him; the welts upon his body yet remaining from the jailer's lash at Philippi were the στίγματα to testify of him that he was the Lord's bondman; all questions about customs and requirements under the old law were obsolete, and agitation of them in the churches could only bring useless trouble upon Paul. To the careful student of the Greek, therefore, this must appear as the only true and adequate rendering of the four words of adjuration as Luke has written them in this parable; they mean much more than to say: "Do not bother me," or "Stop this worrying," for they signify an actual trouble that is to be brought on the neighbour through compliance with the demand of his friend. If our Lord meant that the former was only protesting against a mere teasing by the host, there are three or four single verbs any one of which He would have employed to express this, and with far greater accuracy than by this phrase of four words which He has put in the mouth of the householder. See Luke vii. 6, viii. 49; Acts xvii. 8; Gal. i. 7, v. 10.

Thus the neighbour's thought is not that he is personally pestered, irritated, and provoked; but

he means that the host's irrational conduct will "bring troubles" as its result; and we can well understand what those troubles would be; the noise of unlocking and opening the door, and the drawing off from his children the covering that is over both him and them will awaken them, and so the cold, the noise, and the voice to them strange at this hour in their half-awakened state, all in the deep darkness of the night, must set his children in great fright with crying and screams and calls for "Papa"; but expostulation is of no avail with the shameless and reckless petitioner; the neighbour quickly perceives this, and promptly decides that the easiest way out of this predicament is to get up at once, give the man his loaves, and send him off as soon as possible; he will not stop to count them in the darkness, but will be sure to give him more than he asks for, so that he will not return. We need not assume that in doing this he is actuated by the least ill-will or by any thought of unkindness; his conduct is simply governed by and suited to the facts of the case; while he well understands the pleader's motive, he does not indulge in recrimination or passion; he calmly and practically acts according to the circumstances of the moment, and merely in a way to avoid the "troubles." The picture commonly drawn of this scene, representing the host as standing without for quite a time and making repeated requests, using "importunity," is not the true one; importunity is the last thing the neighbour can allow; it is the one event of all others to be prevented or arrested, for the longer the importunity the greater the "troubles";

it must be cut off short; so he rises at once and stops it by giving the man what he wants.

The right rendering of the Greek word ἀναιδίαν is not "importunity," but shamelessness; the very composition of the word indicates its meaning, "without shame." And here we must come to the conclusion that the translators of the Authorized version nearly three hundred years ago adopted this wrong word, importunity, as a necessary consequence of their wrong interpretation of the parable; the error of it began then, for, wrongly assuming that the host was in the right with his petition, they could not see wherein he was shameless; so they had to make a new meaning for the word; in this way it undoubtedly was that the wrong exegesis of the first part of this parable determined and made necessary the translation of this word into "importunity," and this meaning was adopted also in order to preserve a consistent exegesis in its latter part. Having been mistranslated in our English Bibles for two hundred and eighty years, it must now perforce appear in our Greek lexicons as one of the meanings of ἀναιδίαν; but it should not be forgotten that it was the wrong translation that created the wrong dictionary meaning, and not the dictionary meaning that made the wrong translation; the Revised version has simply followed in the same line of error (*vide* Alford *in loco*).

It must be believed that our Master exercised at least ordinary care and precision in the use of words, and that He would not employ any terms in His discourse except such as would convey His thought accurately and with definite clearness;

therefore, if He had meant only "importunity" in this case, He would have spoken a more appropriate word than *ἀναιδίαν*; or, if He uttered this parable in Aramaic, then Luke, in selecting the right word in Greek for the purpose of this record, did certainly take pains to give us this as the one word justly and accurately corresponding to the Aramaic word Jesus had used; for if He had really intended "importunity" there are Greek words that would have much better conveyed His thought, such as some of the compounds of *αἰτέω*, as *προσαίτησιν*, or *παραίτησιν*, or *επαίτησιν*. But He used a word which, both by general usage of that time and by derivation, bore the meaning "without shame." We have endeavoured to show that the term "shamelessness" applies not simply to the act of asking, but also to the character of the host, and to his conduct as the natural exhibition of his heedless selfishness, and that the neighbour's knowledge of this trait, and thus his ready appreciation of the uselessness of remonstrance, prompted him to quickly give all and more than was asked for. So that to put importunity in place of shamelessness is absolutely to reverse the parable, to turn it around and make it teach just the opposite of what it does teach.

And now, under our right exegesis, what is the application of the parable? Jesus himself gives it in the next sentence—"Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Here are simply six repeti-

tions of the same thought, and there is nothing more in them than the assurance, "Your prayers shall be answered, your prayers shall be answered," six times repeated and variously given to make it tremendously emphatic, and as if our dear Saviour would impress the fact on our memories with such force and vividness that it might never be forgotten. Much paper has been spoiled in the attempt to set forth the supposed figurative meanings of these six phrases, but such expositions are to be discredited as overstrained, far-fetched, and at variance with that direct and simple clearness in method which always constitutes the power and charm of Jesus' teaching; we are simply to accept them in their plain intent and meaning, and as evidence of the intense earnestness of Jesus in assuring us that our prayers can never fail of an answer. These two verses, Luke xi. 9, 10, are to be cherished as next in value to John iii. 16; the latter is precious to the penitent seeking for pardon and salvation, but the former is the golden signet-ring given into the hand of the redeemed by which he makes claim to the royal heritage pledged in the words, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

But there is another lesson to be drawn from the parable. God sees our thoughts and knows our motives, whatever our acts and words may be. The host, rousing up his friend, was not at heart a bad character; he was vain, fond of displaying his virtues, inconsiderate of others, selfish and persistent where his own advantage was concerned; but, in

all, he was honest and sincere; he did not pretend that the traveller was hungry, but frankly gave the reason for his petition as one relating to himself alone; though his motive was not of the highest and purest, he yet obtained the bread and thus an answer to his prayer. God is in heaven and we upon earth; He knows what we have need of before we ask Him; He can make allowance for all our ignorance, our mistakes, misjudgments, prejudices, likes and dislikes, our disregard of others or lack of consideration for them, our selfishness and vanity. We do not know our own hearts fully and cannot ever know how much "shamelessness" arising from these qualities God sees in us when we offer prayer; but if we are sincere and true, and particularly if our prayers can abide the test the Apostle James has given, that we ask not to "consume it upon our lusts," then we may feel some assurance that our prayers will have an answer. The petition of the host began and ended with self; our prayers are too often shameless in beginning and ending with self, yet God hears and answers them.

The demand of the host must have come upon his friend at midnight with very much of a shock, at both its untimeliness and the lack of a valid reason for it; in his first hasty thought his remonstrant mood makes him say, "I cannot rise and give thee," but his second thought is, "Yes, I can, and that is the best way to deal with this strange and foolish request." Is it not so many times with God when our prayers at first go up before Him? The absurdities in them which we do not see are so open to Him; looking at them

from His own point of view, He would deem it impossible to grant them; but regarded from our point of view and as we think they would affect ourselves and others, He sees the best course is to answer them.

But still further than this, there is a spiritual shamelessness actually enjoined upon us, both by the lesson of the parable and by that of the passage immediately preceding it. A disciple has just besought Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray," and in response He gives them the Lord's Prayer. Now, since the parable directly follows the prayer with naught else between, we may fairly infer that it was spoken altogether in illustration and exposition of it; and thus we might expect to find in the several petitions of the prayer the elements of a spiritual shamelessness corresponding closely to the shamelessness in word and act of the midnight petitioner. Consider the first four petitions of the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Thy name (ἁγιασθήτω); Thy kingdom come (ἐλθάτω); Give (δίδου) us each day our daily bread; And forgive (ἄφες) us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." The imperative verbs in these four requests are very significantly put in the aorist tense, and they furnish a broad, pervasive, and inclusive sweep for the meaning of every sentence. Thus the four petitions may be read: "Let Thy name be hallowed completely, immediately, universally; May thy kingdom come at once and everywhere; Supply our temporal needs fully to-day; Forgive us our debts fully and completely, for after that manner have we for-

given our debtors." In these four of its terms the Lord's Prayer is positive, unconditional, downright; and their very brevity implies their comprehensive scope.

Whatever may be our conclusions as to the answers God makes to our prayers, there can be no doubt here as to the intent of our Lord to have His prayer (the model for all others) framed upon these lines of positive and direct supplication, and for present and immediate benefits. How to pray is one thing, how God answers prayer is another and very different thing; our prayers for all good objects may be conceived in a spirit of great exaggeration and unbounded expectancy; this is what our Lord commands and commends and exemplifies in the model set for us: "After this manner pray ye" (Matt. vi. 9). Consider for a moment what a climax of spiritual shamelessness is in these words: "And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." A certain servant owed his lord ten thousand talents, but when about to be sold with wife and children, he appealed successfully to the mercy of his lord and was forgiven the debt; the same servant, however, could not forgive a fellow-servant one hundred pence. Ten thousand (silver) talents are fifteen million dollars; one hundred pence are fifteen dollars. Now, it is fair and natural to believe that Jesus, in naming these two sums, had in mind a sense of the difference between them and that He intended by them to represent, not accurately nor to any minute particular indeed, but still in some proportional measure, the relation our-

sins against God bear to the sins of our fellow-men against us; He might have named one talent or even ten talents in place of one hundred pence, or five thousand in place of the ten thousand talents, and then the difference would have seemingly been almost great enough; but by what He did say, He without doubt meant that there was virtually an infinite degree of proportion between the two cases of debt; and we are to interpret the expressions as constituting a declaration that the sins of others against us are to be accounted as nothing in comparison with our sins against our Heavenly Father. Yet in this prayer we are to ask Him to forgive us our infinite debt when we have forgiven our fellow-man a paltry nothing, and are to boldly proffer this fact of our forgiveness of mere trifles as a valid and sufficient REASON for His forgiveness!!! Oh, the unbounded shamelessness of it! When did ever human reason or love operate to make fifteen dollars equal in a spiritual or moral application to fifteen millions? yet here they are made so in the equations of God's arithmetic, and we see them, by a rule of divine dynamics, set in precious equipoise, swinging free in opposite scales with level beam and even balance! Observe the notable difference between the passage here and as it occurs in Matthew's Gospel, "Forgive us, for we also forgive," *καὶ ΓΑΡ αυτοὶ ἀφίομεν;* while in Matthew it is: "As we also have forgiven," *ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφηκάμεν.*

Having thus, under our new interpretation, found the true lessons of the parable, let us draw a comparison between the new and the old. The old

and erroneous exposition represents the traveller as desiring or needing food at midnight, a time when it is neither natural nor healthful to take it, nor made obligatory under the rules of hospitality to furnish it; it ignores also the custom of travellers to carry their own loaves with them in their scrip. The host is represented as perfectly right and reasonable in waking up his neighbour and urging a petition for food; the neighbour is all wrong in objecting, in manner and words he is surly and cross, and gives the bread only after much "importunity." The application is, we must always go to God with proper requests and great importunity, for He loves our clamour and delays answer in order to enjoy our repeated appeals, just as an earthly father enjoys the teasing of his children; but God is not like the neighbour in that the latter was morose and sullen in his giving. Thus the parable is lamely made to deny its own nature, in giving a lesson by contrast and not, according to the true constitution of a parable, by likeness.

In opposition to this, our new exposition declares that the traveller did not need food and was not entitled to it as a guest, or that, if he did need, he had it with him; that the host was doing an unnecessary act in rousing up the neighbour, and that the latter gave the shameless one at once all that he asked for. Our application is that, in spite of any extravagance or impropriety in our prayers, God does hear and answer them; He loves us for the motives that prompt to shamelessness in asking for any good thing, but He does not love us for mere importunity, and He has assured us that He will

certainly answer our prayers. Our Lord has given us encouragement in this by the unlimited terms in which nearly all the petitions of His model prayer are conceived. The Apostle Paul confirms us in this blessed assurance, declaring in his letter to the Ephesians (iii. 20) that "God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." There is a tremendous sweep in these words. Do we ask for all, everything good we would have done? He is able to do exceeding abundantly above that; but we are not able to ask or even to think of all the good things He is able to do; we cannot THINK of enough good things to have done!

Nor is there need to be very choice or precise in the selection of our words. To show this, Paul in another place (Romans viii. 26, 27) sets forth the manner in which God receives and interprets our petitions. We know not what we should pray for as we ought, so the Spirit helps our infirmities and makes up for our ignorance and our failure to comprehend all the glorious possibilities open to us through prayer; so far from making selection of subjects, or fine choice of words; so far from confining ourselves to those things which to our limited view seem only the proper things to be prayed for, we may go as the host did, careless about words or about proprieties of time or place, and with shamelessness ask, knowing that we can never ask enough; for we are assured that He that searcheth our hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit when that Spirit translates our weak, ill-directed, disjointed, and thinly-diluted prayers into such ripe,

rounded, symmetrical prayers as shall call down from heaven a response fully in consonance with that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. There are thus furnished to us in this parable reasons without number or limit for going boldly to The Throne of Grace.

REVENGE.

LUKE XVIII. 1–8.

THIS parable was spoken "to the end that men ought always to pray and not faint." The interpretation generally given is: that a widow, by her importunity, obliged an unwilling and unjust judge to grant the justice rightfully her due from her adversary; and the lesson is said to be, that we should use importunity in our prayers, going often with the same petition to God; He loves to hear us pray, takes pleasure in our importunity, and, after withholding for a time the answer, eventually grants what we ask. Our faith is also said to be increased and strengthened by this persistence in prayer. In this parable also, as in that of the Friend at Midnight, there is one character by whom the lesson is said to come in the way of contrast and not of likeness; it is asserted that God cannot be like the unjust judge, indifferent as to the righteousness or unrighteousness of His own conduct and the administration of His own government; that, in contrast to the unjust judge, He is always willing to hear us, and that if an unjust judge was constrained by importunity to grant a helpless widow's request, much more our Father, a just judge, will be moved by our importunity.

We take decided exception to this interpretation and to its application, and, as in the former parable,

declare that the unjust judge represents God directly and by likeness in both his acts and words, and does not represent Him by way of contrast or unlikeness. We are to have the judge "cast alongside" of God as in the true method of a *παραβολη*, and in all that he does and says he is acting in a truly parallel way, and illustrates God's methods and plans as directly as any character in any other parable spoken by Jesus. On a close study it will be seen that in both Authorized and Revised versions the following words and phrases have not been correctly translated: First, in the reason given by the judge for a change in his conduct toward the widow, *διάγε τὸ παρέχειν μοι κοπον τὴν χήραν ταύτην*, the translation is, "because this widow troubleth me"; but the true meaning to be given it is, "because this widow is bringing trouble upon me"; in the wrong translation the thought is, "she is a pestering, teasing, worrying creature," but by the right rendering the thought is, "there is a real, tangible trouble she is bringing upon me as a consequence of this continual coming." Secondly, the words *ἵνα μὴ ὑπωπιασῃ με* are rendered, "lest she weary me," but the right meaning is, "lest she give me a black eye"; the thought is, not that the woman will pester the judge till he is tired out, and so yields from mere intolerance of her worriments, but it is that a black eye will be given him through her coming; this black eye being a more specific name for, or a culmination of, the "trouble" she was to bring on him. What was meant by the black eye will be shown further on.

Thirdly, Our Lord says (7th and 8th verses) *ποιήσει τὴν ἐκδίκησιν*, "He will (do or work or) make revenge for His chosen"; this is the literal and correct translation, and the two words should be so rendered in English that they may preserve the full force of the Greek, and not by the milder and weaker phrase, "He will avenge"; for the thought is of an intense purpose by our Heavenly Father to do very effectively and completely whatever He would do for His elect. These two expressions, made up of the verb with the noun, are thus notably twice repeated in this application made by our Lord of the parable. Again, in the first part of the parable, there are presented by the current method of exposition other wrong readings of certain terms. The word "avenge," as used by the widow, is made to mean "do right or do justice"; such rendering is utterly inadequate; *ἐκδίκησόν με* (the aorist of the imperative) in the mouth of the woman plainly means "avenge me"; mere right or justice is not what she is asking for; it is something more than these and very much more; she is set on securing a recompense beyond what is just or right; she demands revenge. She does not say, *δίκαιωσόν με*, "do me justice," which would be the proper verb if only justice was sought for, but *ἐκδίκησόν με*, "avenge me"; and *ἐκδίκησις*, for its full and true significance, can never be restricted to mean only *δίκη*.

One principal difference between this present interpretation of the parable and the exegesis hitherto generally accepted consists in the difference in application of the Greek word *ἐκδίκησις*

or ἐκδικήσω and of the English word "avenge." To illustrate: A may do an injury to B, and B may express in English a desire to be avenged for that injury; such an expression is susceptible of two meanings: either (c) that B should receive a recompense exactly and justly commensurate with the injury, which would be simple justice; or (d) that this recompense should exceed the limit of what would be rightfully and equitably due him; and then it would be revenge. But it will be found, upon a close study of all those passages in the New Testament and Septuagint in which ἐκδίκησις and its co-derivatives are employed, that those words in all of them bear the wide and comprehensive meaning indicated in (d); and that the significance of them would be unwarrantably restricted, and the true and full tenor of those passages would be lost, if their application were to be limited as set forth in (c). Thus it may be seen that the usage of the English "avenge" is much broader in scope than that of the Greek word, since it is in our modern tongue loosely and without discrimination applicable to any case of recompense, whether of justice or revenge.

Therefore, proceeding from such conclusion in this present case, it must appear as a fact established, that the limitation by interpreters of the widow's appeal to a demand for mere justice cannot be constituted from a proper application of the Greek word ἐκδικήσον. The broad and loose usage of the English word "avenge" has thus misled our exegetes into the wrong assignment to the Greek word of a meaning more restricted

and narrow than its usage by contemporary Greek authors would sanction. Indeed, the tendency has ever been to minimize the meanings of words and phrases of this parable in some instances, and to "strain" the meanings in others. It must be believed that our Divine Master exercised at least ordinary intelligence in the choice of words, and that Luke, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, as well as of his own mental power to discriminate, chose the right Greek words to express the thoughts uttered by our Saviour in Aramaic, if He did so utter them. There was a purpose definitely exercised in the selection of the characters of the parable, and in the words that set forth their thoughts and acts. The selection of an unjust instead of a just judge was for a purpose; there was a significance in making a widow the petitioner rather than any other character; it was for a purpose and with right appreciation of the force of the words that Jesus four times spoke of revenge and not once of justice; if He had used this latter term but once in the parable, there might have been some slight ground for regarding the two terms as convertible, but as He did not, we are fairly to conclude that He used the word ἐκδίκησιν in its ordinary and accepted Greek sense.

Too often, apparently, an excessive fear of making a parable "go on all fours" has restrained expositors from giving to each character and act and expression in a parable its proper representative value; such a fear has doubtless operated in this instance to nullify and make valueless the words and acts of the two persons in the parable;

attention has been strongly fixed upon the "importunity" supposed to be its only lesson, the word-meanings have been made adjustable as closely as might be to that, and no stress at all has been laid upon the peculiar and operative words and sentences evidently framed with a fine discriminative sense of their import by our Great Teacher, that they might convey clearly and accurately all of the lesson He intended. The warning against going on all fours might well enough be addressed, as doubtless it often was of old, to those hair-splitting scribes who could make their microscopic analyses so fine as to discover meanings in the turn of every letter or in its position on the parchment roll; who could strain out gnats and swallow many a camel in their elaborate and fantastic expositions of the Law; but we need not, in this day of enlightenment, be restrained, through any consideration of its abuse, from putting to its right and fairly intended use every portion of these divine teachings of Jesus; and we need claim for Him simply the same discretion in the ordinary use of language that we ourselves would have. It certainly could not be that He, in all other cases so careful and unerring in diction, should in the two instances of these parables have been so very negligent and clumsy; it is preferable, at all hazards, to take these terms in their plain, usual, and open sense, and if that does not lead us to a natural and fair explanation, then to confess our inability to find a present solution, and wait in patience, ignorant of the precious lesson, until the Spirit of Truth may give such spiritual insight into

"the deep things of God" as will enable us to fully unfold them in their beauty and power. Meanwhile, and with earnest prayer for that light, let one humble attempt here be made to bring out what may be deemed its right interpretation.

A widow comes to the court of an unjust judge; she can come because she is a widow, uncontrolled by any one; a wife or daughter could not come, for the Oriental husband or father, if he approved of the cause, would come himself in their place, and if he disapproved would not allow them to come; a man would not be allowed to come, even "for a while," for he could be more summarily dealt with than a woman, and driven with blows from the judgment seat. So it is a widow, one with the privilege to come "continually," who appears before a judge, not of righteousness, but of unrighteousness, and pleads, "avenge me of my adversary." Evidently, we are not to regard this woman as like other widows referred to in the Bible; she was not of the weak-minded, nerveless sort, yielding without opposition to any oppression it was the common custom to visit upon defenceless widows of that time; the fact of coming with a petition for revenge marks her as of strong will and probably unscrupulous purpose; so that, not tamely submitting to injustice, she is before the judge, with full resolution and a settled plan for getting even and more than even with her adversary. She comes to an unjust, not to a just judge, for the former could give her revenge, but the latter only justice. The judge allows her to come for a while, *ἐπὶ χρόνον*, but at the end of that "while,"

however long it may have been, he finds it not best for him to let her come any longer; she is bringing trouble and must be stopped, for if her coming should be continual, *εἰς τέλος*, she would give him a black eye. It is evident from the manner of statement that in the judge's view the *κόπον* and the *ὑπωπίασιν* are the same, or at least that the former is a direct and immediate result of the latter. What, then, is the "trouble," and what the "black eye"?

To define the latter first, the term clearly has here no meaning of a physical import; there was no danger that the kadi, sitting in a public place, attended by servants and officers of his court to keep between himself and the suitors and audience such respectful distance as would secure due maintenance of dignity and safety, would be struck in the face and under the eye by the fist of the woman in a fit of desperation and despair. The term has only an ethical meaning here, the same as it has with us to-day; that is, to get a black eye means to have one's plans defeated, to be disappointed as to results expected from certain events or acts, to be overthrown by some sudden and unpreventable disaster. Paul used it in such ethical sense when describing his manner of fighting the entangling lusts of the body; he made no feint of the fighting, throwing out his fists at random as one that beateth the air, but straight, solid blows were delivered right "under the eye," and thus his passions were sent to grass and there kept under. His figures were borrowed from the prize-ring in this instance, as they were in some others. What was

the particular ethical character of this black eye in the judge's case?

For an Eastern judge there were no set codes of laws as in Western countries, carefully and elaborately framed, defining and classifying offences, and appointing a fit and well-measured punishment for each; with no guide of this sort, and unfettered by any rules confining his action within well-set bounds, he was free to give judgment according to a few plain general principles of right as he might apprehend them, and to order his decrees under that simple moral code, short and unwritten, which in all ages and nations has bounded almost the entire scope of duty as between man and man. With a power thus practically unlimited, he both made and executed his law; with good common sense, ready seizure of the main points of a case, quick sagacity in applying the remedy or penalty, and, lastly, an honest purpose to do right, he was the ideal kadi of the Orient, well equipped for dispensing a rude justice fairly and efficiently; there, as here, the impartial judge is in high honour, and his decrees are accepted and obeyed as the unavoidable decrees of fate. Before such a judge of righteousness immediate and complete relief is the result of his trial to every suitor, and he would not be put off unless for the purpose of obtaining new evidence. The judgment rendered by King Solomon (1 Kings iii. 16–28) in the case of a claim by two women of the same living child, is a fine example of the methods and ways open to an honest Eastern judge in arriving at a just and instant decision; the whole transaction might not have occu-

pied more than fifteen minutes. To the mind of an Oriental, therefore, delay by a judge for days in giving judgment would appear strange and unaccountable; inquiries would arise as to the reasons for a suitor to be "continually coming"; if suspicions were well founded that he had a case too complicated for him to master, or, if able, he was unwilling for sordid or dishonest reasons to give a decision, then, and in either instance, his capacity and integrity would, in the popular thought, receive a serious blow; all trust in his uprightness would be gone, his unfitness for the office made clear; he would receive (almost without metaphor) a black eye in the loss of his reputation and of the confidence of the community; for it is true in Eastern, as in Western lands, no judge can long hold office who administers it without the "fear of God or the regard of man." And the consequences might not stop there; reports of his inefficiency and dishonesty would reach the ears of his superiors, and if proved true, he would lose his office, and might lose his head.

It is clear, therefore, that the continual coming of this woman must be stopped if this unjust judge would avert the disaster sure to follow; and so far from allowing her any exercise of "importunity," it is the very condition most to be dreaded and avoided. The "for-a-while" has been already too far prolonged; the trouble she is bringing will surely draw on its dread result if any importunity is permitted. He will prevent it at once by granting her prayer, giving her the revenge she asks; to give mere justice would not be enough; it would not

stop her coming; she could and would, with a woman's persistence, come again. She knew that from an unjust judge she could as well have revenge as justice; she held the key of the situation, so that he "who feared not God nor regarded man" is constrained to do the behest of a defenceless, powerless woman. The tables are, in a manner, turned; the two parties change positions: she is the real judge and arbiter of his fate; he is helplessly compelled to do her wishes, and there is no other resource left him. He might now offer to give her justice, to have her adversary appear with her before him, to hear both sides, and decide impartially and justly; but it is not the nature of an unjust judge to do that. It is also too late now; his office and possibly life are in instant peril; the one thing to do is to grant her prayer and stop her coming.

In the work by Canon Tristam, entitled "Eastern Customs in Bible Lands," there is an interesting passage in the chapter entitled "Eastern Jurisprudence," pages 228 and 229, as follows: "I well remember a scene which vividly re-enacted the parable of the 'Unjust Judge.' It was in the ancient city of Nisibis, in Mesopotamia. Immediately on entering the gate of the city, on one side stood the prison with its barred windows, through which the prisoners thrust their arms and begged for alms. Opposite was a large open hall, the court of justice of the place. On a slightly raised dais at the further end sat the kadi or judge, half buried in cushions. Round him squatted various secretaries and other notables. The populace crowded into

the rest of the hall, a dozen voices clamouring at once, each claiming that his cause should be first heard. The more prudent litigants joined not in the fray, but held whispered communications with the secretaries, passing bribes, euphemistically called fees, into the hands of one or another. When the greed of the underlings was satisfied, one of them would whisper to the kadi, who would promptly call such and such a case. It seemed to be ordinarily taken for granted that judgment would go for the litigant who had bribed highest. But meantime a poor woman on the skirts of the crowd perpetually interrupted the proceedings with loud cries for justice. She was sternly bidden to be silent, and reproachfully told that she came there every day. 'And so I will,' she cried out, 'till the kadi hears me.' At length, at the end of a suit, the judge impatiently demanded, 'What does that woman want?' Her story was soon told. Her only son had been taken for a soldier, and she was left alone and could not till her piece of ground; yet the tax-gatherer had forced her to pay the impost, from which as a lone widow she should be exempt. The judge asked her a few questions, and said, 'Let her be exempt.' Thus her perseverance was rewarded. Had she had money to fee a clerk, she might have been excused long before."

Here we see that the woman was reproached, not for her importunity, but for her coming every day; the other suitors were just as importunate, each crying out for a hearing, but it was for this one day, no evidence appearing that, like the woman, they had been coming every day. With

her, as with the widow of the parable, it was not importunity for one day, but the "continual coming" that in both cases brought the favourable decree. A clear distinction must thus be made in the meanings of the two expressions; it is a conclusion altogether unwarranted to say that they are of interchangeable application. The main difference between the woman in this account and the widow of our parable is, that the one was asking for what was clearly just, but the other for revenge. The judge whom Canon Tristam saw, had been delaying justice for the sake of a bribe, and yielded to the woman when it turned out that she had no bribe to give; but the judge in our parable gave the widow her answer for a more honest and serious reason. From the soliloquy which our Lord puts in his mouth we see the workings of his heart; pride and haughtiness were there in abundant measure, but no dishonesty; the words in which Jesus makes him open to us his innermost thought show that fear of a "black eye" was the only but sufficient motive with him for granting her revenge.

Now we have come to the proper application of the parable. We who pray are like the widow, and are to come and ask, not for justice, but for "revenge." There are two passages in the New Testament from which we may obtain the ethical and spiritual meaning of that word as it relates to the subject-matter and to the manner of our prayers; for, as it means, when used in its ordinary and bad sense, an excessive retaliation of evil in return for evil suffered, so, when used, as here, in its good

sense it means an excess of good action, an overplus of well-doing. In 2 Cor. x. 6 Paul commends the obedience to the Gospel of some and condemns the disobedience of others, and declares that after the fulfilment of the obedience of the faithful ones, the disobedience of those hitherto unfaithful shall be "revenged"; that is, through the operation of the spiritual, uncarnal weapons brought to bear upon them, all in them that exalts itself against the knowledge of God shall be cast down, and every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. In 2 Cor. vii. 10 and 11, speaking of the effect upon those to whom he was writing of that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, the Apostle testifies to the carefulness, the clearing of themselves, the indignation, fear, desire, zeal, and revenge it wrought in them. Here the particular meaning of "revenge" is made clear from the text preceding; the church at Corinth had for a season dropped into such laxity of discipline as to suffer among them without correction or rebuke a most heinous example of evil as recorded in 1 Cor. v., and when, under the sting of Paul's sharp letter, they had been made conscious of their own sin and had repented, they were most eager to repair the wrong, to purify the church; and then, proceeding further than was required of them strictly in the case, they made for a so much higher spiritual life and for so much purer morals as their life and morals before then had been low and slack; and thus their godly sorrow had wrought upon them its proper and wholesome "revenge."

Such, therefore, must be the true tenor of the word as applied by our Saviour to the prayers of God's elect; they are to ask for such abundance as to quantity, such excellence as to quality, of all the good things He has to give, as will be far in excess of what, in men's judgment, would be deemed reasonable and fair; they are to go beyond justice, and ask for revenge. And He can grant it. Bound by no consideration whatever as limiting His will and power, high above all law (as He is the author of all law), high above that realm where what we apprehend as causes and effects are in action, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think"; in all these respects He is like the unjust judge. Like him also in another and wonderful respect; for as the judge is compelled by the widow, and must comply under peril of disgrace and loss, so our gracious God represents Himself here as placing at stake His character as the hearer and answerer of prayer, and as resting upon it His very title to office as our Father and God. This thought controls in the application by our divine Lord, "He will (or shall) work out the avenging of His own elect." He shows God as having a certain relation to His people; they are His chosen ones, and therefore, as in all other instances where persons or people are spoken of as "chosen," there is implied a mutual covenant. God's elect have duties to perform toward Him, and, on the other hand, God has duties to perform toward His elect. It is God's side of this covenant which our Saviour lays stress upon in this application; He puts it in the strong inter-

rogative form, "And shall not God work out the avenging of His own elect?" as if to say: "How preposterous to think that God shall not work out the avenging of His own elect! He shall, and from the very fact that He has chosen them." God is under constraint and tied up to just such a course with His elect; He cannot free Himself from it except He cast them off utterly and disown them as His elect, something He has never yet done and never can do while they are faithful to Him. Our Master assuredly intended to emphasize these covenant relations, as constituting a strong and indefeasible claim upon our Heavenly Father, making impossible the refusal of any prayer. This is the all-sufficient reason why "men ought always to pray and not faint."

It remains to notice some expressions in the 6th and 7th verses. "Hear what the unjust judge saith." Our attention is directed, not to what the judge does, not to what the widow does or says, but only to what the *judge says;* he will avenge her lest she give him a black eye; so he declares; he could not suffer her coming any more; the motive for his action is selfish, not dictated by any benevolent feeling toward the supplicant; nevertheless, the action promptly relieves the widow. God is the fountain of love and mercy; nay, He is love itself; and if He would be God, then He must for his own sake and of necessity answer prayer; and, further, all the while that He is working out revenge for His chosen, He is also *μακροθυμεῖ* ("broad-hearted") toward them. This word, translated "long-suffering" and "having patience"

in other parts of the New Testament, is not well given the right sense here in the English word "long-suffering"; as intended by Luke, the Greek word has a meaning different from that conveyed by the English word into which it is translated; it is *not* the true thought that God is bearing with us beyond what we ought to expect, that we are, so to speak, trespassing on His kindness and good-will nearly to the exhaustion of His patience. This English double word has been changed in its application since the translation of the Bible two hundred and eighty years ago; then it had a meaning purely and singly good, that of kindness and forbearance without implication of unmerited toleration toward a sinful person or sinful act; as used in this parable, therefore, it has that singly good meaning, and, in fact, it has such in all the other New Testament uses. A good example of this is shown in 2 Peter iii. 15: "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation"; the context both before and following this passage shows Peter as addressing, not a church that was provoking God by inconsistent and blameworthy lives, but a church of those chosen ones who were honouring Him "in all holy living and godliness." So in 1 Peter iii. 20; God's plan in waiting one hundred and twenty years was full of broad, generous love to the people of Noah's time. *Μακρός* has the meaning of largeness in all directions—broad, deep, long; *θῡμός* is the soul, heart, the emotional nature as contrasted on one side with *πνεῦμα*, which is the spiritual nature, human or divine (Green's N. T. Syno-

nyms), and on the other side with *ψῡχή*, which is the life or soul common to man and irrational animals. So that *μακροθυμεῖ*, thus derived, gives a clear perception of the receptive, all-embracing kindness and partiality of God toward His chosen, and it is the only right word here; by the use of any other, such as *μεγαλοψῡχία* or *μεγαλοφροσύνη*, the real purport would not have been indicated, for these were as often employed with a bad meaning (haughtiness, intolerant pride) as with a good. God is great-hearted, broad-souled toward us; and our Master takes pains to affirm this fact lest we carry our parallel too far, and make God to be like the judge in a spiritual way. We must be careful to avoid such error; the parable deals only with the judge's motives and his acts as resulting from them; it does not touch upon his moral qualities, nor at any point bring them into likeness with God's attributes. There now follows the assertion, twice repeated, that God is and will be working out revenge for the elect, crying unto Him day and night; *ποιήσει* denotes sustained effort (Green), and sustained effort by an omnipotent Father must bring an answer speedily.

The resemblances of the parable having now been drawn, we may briefly sum up. Suitors in a court of law of our day and in Western lands have certain rights and acquire a certain standing there by reason of their citizenship. These rights are secured under common and statute law, and most of them are set forth in constitutions and bills of rights; by them the humblest citizen is fenced about with well-defined safeguards from any oppression, from

hindrance or refusal on the part of the officers of the law; and he is always sure of a patient hearing and impartial verdict through the just and equitable procedures in our courts. In contrast to this, an Oriental court is and always has been a very nest of venality; quoting again from Doctor Tristam: "From the dawn of history the venality of judges and the miscarriage of justice has been one of the chief abominations which have called down the indignant remonstrances of prophets and holy men. The book of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, prophetical writings, the Gospels themselves, are full of denunciation of unrighteous judges. Nor is the corruption less notorious throughout the whole Eastern world at the present day. A man who, like the foully-murdered Midhat Pasha, sternly refuses bribes on the judgment seat, is still looked upon with wonder and admiration. This character of a judge is indeed contrary to our impressions of that office as we see it in happier Western lands, where public opinion bears strongly on all functionaries, and Christianity has introduced a high standard of rectitude; but it is still to be seen in all its frightful corruption and malignity throughout the whole of Asia." The unjust judge of the Orient, therefore, is and was of this rapacious and sordid character, and was influenced in his decisions by one of two considerations: either, and most generally, by a bribe, or, as in this case in the parable, occasionally by fear of certain evil consequences to follow upon a refusal of the suitor's application; in either case no question of right had of itself any weight, no plea of justice had any

force; the words would be a mockery if applied to any procedure there.

The practice in the prayer court of our Father is constituted upon a plan corresponding ethically to that of the court of the unjust judge. We have no legal standing before Him, we cannot go there with birthright citizenship to institute any suit, we have no natural bill of rights on which to base any demand, we have no standing there to sue for what is just and equitable; all pleas advanced on such ground are thrown out at once, and God sees nothing in us or in our pleadings deserving of a moment's consideration on the basis of mere justice; before His bar such claims are valueless, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags. But once we have become His chosen, and thus approach to offer our suit on the ground of personal privilege and favour, with no plea of merit or desert in the case, then we have His ready ear; He is under the bonds of a solemn covenant which He cannot break, and under peril of a penalty He must not incur, to grant the prayers of His elect, that penalty being the demission of His office as the God of our love, our obedience and our worship. Thus, under the compulsion of His loving relation with us, the ability to fulfil, or the advisability of fulfilling our prayers, however extravagant, become questions of minor importance to our Almighty God, "who is able to do exceeding abundantly above" our prayers.

On account of their peculiar significance, and at the risk of being repetitious, let us direct attention to two or three points already alluded to. Why

did our Master employ the verb only in the first part of the parable and as spoken by the widow and judge, but took the trouble, in His application, to say of God, *ποιήσει ἐκδίκησιν*, using the verb and the noun? For surely it was an unnecessary trouble if those two words meant no more than *ἐκδικήσει*, nor can it be said in any wise that the verb and noun have only a periphrastic use here, and are simply equivalent to the one verb. The many uses in other parts of the New Testament of *ποιέω* with a noun directly controvert such view; for there is in them the idea, spiritual or otherwise as the case may be, of an active and efficient operation. Good examples of this use are afforded in Paul's declarations regarding the prayers he was offering for those to whom he was writing; as in Rom. i. 9, Eph. i. 16, Phil. i. 4, 1 Thess. i. 2, Philem. 4. In these the participle and noun together, "making mention," have an intensive force far beyond what the participle "mentioning" alone would have; they imply a fixed and continuing custom, a settled and forceful habit with Paul of praying for those he was so diligently instructing; yet, in the English translation of this parable the verb "avenge" is alone used in all four instances, and so the grand significance of the continuous and persistent "working out" of revenge by our Father for His chosen is utterly suppressed and put out of sight.

Again, expositors have always applied *ἐκδίκησις* as here meaning only *δίκη*, but a close study of all the uses of *δίκη* and *δίκαιος* and *δίκαιουν* and *δικαίωμα*, on the one hand, and of *ἐκδίκειν* and

ἐκδίκησις, on the other hand, will show a clear-cut difference and distinction in usage in all places except two or three where these words occur in both New Testament and Septuagint; Justice and Right are plainly and exclusively indicated by δίκη, while Revenge and Retribution, without regard to any measure or limitation of either, are as clearly indicated by ἐκδίκησις.

And now, in reviewing, we may draw out on parallel lines the likenesses of our Heavenly Father to the unjust judge:

The judge was an autocrat.	Our Father is all-powerful.
There was no pretence of right in the widow's request.	No right inheres with us to ask God for anything.
The widow, because she was a widow, had a peculiar privilege of coming.	God's chosen stand before Him on the ground of privilege and favour.
The judge granted the widow's prayer from fear of consequences to himself.	Our Father grants our prayers under forfeiture of our obedience, love, and loyalty.
The judge could execute his decree forthwith.	Our Father grants our prayers speedily.

It is thus plainly apparent that this parable deals with no questions of right or justice touching our intercourse with God. For if He were only just, He would be bound strictly by the ordinary laws of moral cause and effect *as we understand them;* His acts would be circumscribed in scope by those laws, just as there are right rules governing the acts of a righteous earthly judge in these modern times. God never could overstep those laws; and we never could ask Him to do so. Fur-

thermore, we must always know what it is right and just to ask of Him, and that would imply either the possession of divine omniscience, or else the tacit and offensive assertion that we are rightly deserving of what we ask.

If the lesson of the parable were that God does but justly in answer to prayer, then it would need to be entirely reconstructed, and should read after this manner: "In a certain city there was a judge just and upright, fearing God and regarding man; and a widow of that city came to him, saying, 'Do justice for me against my adversary'; and after waiting a while in order to enjoy her entreaties, and also that her trust in his ability and good-will might be well developed and strengthened, he did as she wished; he called the widow and her adversary both before him, heard patiently both sides of the case, and gave his decision in accordance with equity and fairness. In this way God answers our prayers; He limits Himself by set rules, and will not go beyond them, and is not moved even to do right until after a 'continual coming,' after much importunity and clamour. Thus do we exercise our faith, and it is such faith He expects to find on earth at His coming." Such would be the lesson perfectly consistent with such a parable; it fits every way, but it is a most absurd misfit when applied to the parable of the unjust judge. To obtain it from the latter many of the terms must, as we have seen, be perverted or nullified; one of the characters must be misrepresented as asking for what she did not want, and the parabolic quality must be destroyed

in making the application from the other character by contrast and not by likeness.

That so many of the words and phrases of this parable should have been thus weakly and inadequately rendered into English, would seem somewhat strange; for there are no other such and so many instances in all the New Testament within so small a space; and yet it will not appear so unaccountable if we keep it in view that the translators three hundred years ago would have had in mind "importunity" as the lesson conveyed by the parable, and that, as predicated upon this, they were bound to so render the words into English as that they should conform with, or at least be not repugnant to, such a lesson. Of this case, therefore, as of the case of *ἀναίδια* in "The Friend at Midnight," it may be said that new meanings for the Greek-English lexicon were originated through this necessity for confirming or establishing an interpretation then and ever since believed to be the true one, but which we have now tried to show is erroneous; so that the exegesis was not at all determined by the real meanings and tenor of the words as employed under Greek usage at the time Luke recorded them.

We come now to the crown and capstone of the parable in the momentous question: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" It is generally passed by as of little moment, or is treated often as a graceful round-up of the parable, but nowhere between the covers of the Bible has one been placed of more solemn import; and its strong significance has

been all frittered away and dissipated under the weak and watery interpretation of "importunity"; as if the lesson were only "clamour," an indefinite continuance in begging, a teasing of God till He gets tired and answers merely to get rid of us; as if there was required a certain amount of noisy entreaty to move Him; as if we were to ding our prayers into His ears, and, like the heathen, think we will be heard for our much speaking!! Far above all such low views, the precious lesson summons us to the glorious faith and trust that God is ever lovingly near us, so devoted to us under the terms of our covenant with Him that He can never refuse anything to His chosen, and would never if He could. Here do we surely know that they who wait on the Lord shall not want any good thing. Here is revealed the kind of faith that our Lord is in doubt about finding on the earth at His coming; faith in exercising our privileges as His chosen; faith in asking extravagantly and boundlessly; faith that He, in thus covenanting, has deliberately and graciously put from Himself all choice in the case and is compelled to give answer; faith that men will, down through all the ages, so put in practice the lesson of this priceless parable that they will always pray and not faint.

PRAYER.

James v. 16, 17, 18.

There stands out from the main form of our Old Testament Scripture a notable example of successful prayer, a prayer offered with sincerest desire for God's glory and the enthronement of His righteousness in the hearts of erring men, but with most mistaken estimate of the right means and method for promoting it. The contest between Elijah, the clear-hearted, sincere man of God, and Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, offers the occasion for an interesting study of the subject of prayer.

The earnest prophet had earnestly prayed God to withhold rain and dew until such time as he (Elijah) should desire their return. It is not difficult to understand the course of reasoning which had brought the prophet to this conclusion. After the death of good Asa a succession of wicked kings sat on the throne, each more vile than his predecessor, until the culmination of all infamy had come in the persons of Ahab and his heathen wife, Jezebel. What was to become of God's chosen people if this awful downward course of corruption was held? This was the problem weighing heavily on Elijah's heart; he was very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, and whatever measure human wit could devise to arrest this portentous slide into perdition ought to be adopted and put in force at once. The disease had fast hold of the people at the very

vitals of their spiritual life; and any remedy, to be effective, must be of heroic nature, and be put with no delay into heroic practice. It must be one to take hold on all the people; for, through the degrading worship of the vile god Baal and the viler goddess Ashtoreth, the people were rapidly sinking into the foul pit of a beastly sensuality. Their land, so smiling and fruitful everywhere, must be stricken; life must be made hard to them and not easy; the labour of watering the soil for their crops must be added to the ordinary work of cultivation; in place of ease and plenty, the earth must yield only scanty returns to severe labour; the people would then have little or no time for resort to the groves or to the House of Baal in Samaria, a place abominable for indulgence in the worship and licentious rites instituted by Ahab, "whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Such sore affliction would also bring the people to better thoughts; they would remember the broken law of their righteous God, and would live again under the pure and hallowing influences of those ceremonial rites instituted by Moses and faithfully observed by their fathers during many generations. Surely, under the weight of so great suffering their souls would be softened and penitent, they would forsake their wicked ways and seek the Lord Jehovah, and He would be favourably entreated of them and would turn their hearts back again. So, heedless of any personal danger to result from the wrath of Jezebel, Elijah boldly goes to Ahab and announces the commencement of a drought that is to continue as long as Elijah shall require.

But he soon found how sadly he had miscalculated the influences of adversity upon such a people whom he would save, as it were, in spite of themselves. Misfortunes and hard afflictions have, in themselves, no salvatory power; they may serve as fingers on a guide-post, pointing out the right path at the parting of the ways, but still the rebellious heart has its own choice of route, and may keep straight on in the path to destruction. Under the desperate control and counsel of Jezebel, Elijah had been singled out by Ahab to be hunted down like a wild beast, and all prophets of the Lord whom the Obadiahs could not hide and nourish were put to the sword. As the drought was prolonged, and its bitter effects brought greater suffering, so grew the hate of that hardened woman, the real ruler of Israel; and Jehovah's special care was over Elijah, to save him from her unceasing search in Samaria and neighbouring countries. At length, as three and a half years of famine had now prevailed, and there were no signs of any change in the hearts of the people, no turning away from the idols and idol worship they had learned to love, the conclusion must have forced itself upon Elijah that, after all, this famine policy was a failure; and he began to see that adversity does not of itself foster virtuous feelings and resolves; that disaster coming upon men's temporal affairs never softens their stubborn wills to make them love sin any the less, or to break the chains that bind them to their lusts. On the contrary, he had seen the degradation month after month becoming more prevalent, so that to all appearance the people

were ripe for an utter forsaking of the true God, had forgotten the teachings of their fathers and the stern lessons of Sodom and Gomorrah, and would wholly embrace the idolatry of Baal with all its train of abominations.

In this view, the one thing now to do was to call on Jehovah for restoration of the rain; but, before that, he would make a last effort to arrest the people's attention, to vindicate the omnipotence of God, and to demonstrate beyond question His supremacy over Baal; perhaps, after such demonstration, they might turn and repent, might throw off the yoke of wicked Ahab and choose one who would rule righteously and in the fear of God. So we may believe that in prayer to Jehovah he spread before Him the plan of the gathering on Carmel, the two altars and the miracle of sacrifice by Heaven's fire; and that God granted his prayer and promised performance of His own part in it. We need not rehearse the grand but familiar story; the fire fell, the sacrifice was consumed, and then the people could not but shout, "The Lord Jehovah, He is the God!" Elijah was weak enough (we might say he would have been almost more than mortal not) to take advantage of this opportune moment for the use of a resistless power thus suddenly given. The love of despotism is ingrained in the Oriental heart, and the temptation to make this a temporal and not a spiritual success was altogether too great. "Down to the Kishon with these vile prophets of Baal, every one of them! Let their severed heads dam up its waters and their blood redden its rushing tide!" Foolish

man! In place of permitting those four hundred to live to become the objects of derision and contempt, and the name of Baal a byword and hissing in every border of Israel, he must needs make martyrs of them, and thus give a false glory and greater exaltation to that detestable idolatry in whose service they had died.

Thus the good influence of the grand miracle was quickly dissipated, and the newly-awakened loyalty toward Jehovah was overborne and drowned in the savage cries of Jezebel and her followers for a full requital of this wanton slaughter. The heavy wrath of that infuriate woman is now in dire pursuit of Elijah; he must flee in hot haste to a strong and secret place among the munitions of rocks in Horeb. There, at length, the sad lesson of his mistaken course is brought home to him. He had been trying to teach the people by famine, by miracle, by slaughter; and now the Lord Jehovah, dealing with him after a like manner, would lovingly teach a new lesson to His devoted servant through the exhibition of certain violences in nature corresponding to the moral violences Elijah had employed. The parable of the earthquake, the tempest, and the fire was easy to understand when the Lord had, after them, sent the still, small voice. Let us now clearly understand the character of Elijah. He was large-hearted, but narrow-minded; he was a man of one idea; while he was wholly consecrate and given up in every fibre of his being to the service of his Lord, yet with all this entire devotion he was not of broad mental view, did not

take pains to inform himself of all facts and circumstances bearing on his work, and, as he thus went in ignorance of facts, he was unprepared to meet events with that full wisdom and thorough dealing possible only to those who are completely informed and have accurate gauge of affairs and of the men concerned in them. And if it were not irreverent, we might here write that our Heavenly Father would appear to have a "weak side" toward men of this sort; they endear themselves very greatly to Him by their intense devotion and earnest faith, while they are also erratic, of narrow view, egotistic, and opinionated. Such were David, "the man after God's own heart," Peter, Job, and others who might be named.

There in Horeb were the time and place for the lesson to be taught Elijah; the disappointed and humiliated man confesses his overthrow; all he has done and all God has done through him has gone for nothing; life is even a burden to him; he had sought to do a grand thing, to turn a whole people from sin and idolatry to goodness and true worship, and had utterly failed; he had tried to make men good in outward appearance and by outward pressure, with no reckoning of those interior and spiritual forces under which alone the life can be redeemed from corruption. The Lord gently calls and asks, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" and the ignorant and therefore conceited prophet mournfully replies, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; I, even I, only am left." Until told by Obadiah, Elijah had not known that one hundred prophets were hid away; nor had he

tried to find if any were yet left in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, whether seven thousand or seven hundred or seventy or seven; "I, even I, only am left, a prophet of the Lord." Ah, Elijah, what if, in place of using the lash of famine, you had reflected that there might possibly be others who yet loved and served Jehovah, had endeavoured to know these hidden ones, had secretly visited them, cheered and instructed them, had encouraged them with some of the intrepidity of your own soul; thus might the still, small voice of the Spirit of God have done His quiet and effective work through these upon all the estranged hearts of Israel. You could not then have any the more incurred the hate of Jezebel, and God would not any the less have protected you from her vengeance; so through the dark time of oppression would have been secretly kept and nurtured the nucleus of a faithful party that at the opportune moment might have overturned the throne of Ahab and set in full rule a just and impartial prince.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Not by famine in Samaria, nor by tempest rending the rocks of Horeb; not by sacrificial miracle on Carmel, nor by earthquake in the mount of God; not by slaughter at the Kishon, nor by fire crumbling the granitic masses of Sinai, is the glorious reign of our Jehovah to be established in the souls of men. God is in none of these. They are things to terrify, but never to convince; to cower, but never to turn back the hearts of the wayward and rebellious. The Spirit of All Grace, in all ages freely given, is

the mighty and secret force working wider and more lasting results than would all the wonders and terrors of Carmel and Sinai. Elijah, headstrong and ignorant, was impatient of the slow and hidden movements of God; expecting success in outward demonstration, he was ever looking for it through and in the natural things, seen and temporal, and taking little thought of the spiritual things, unseen and eternal. Yet how God loved him through all! loved him for his pure courage and lofty zeal, for his single-hearted loyalty and devotion; loved him so well that at the last He would not let him know any pangs of mortal dissolution, but carried him undying to heaven, and in a way Elijah best would like, by a whirlwind with horses and chariot of fire.

Before turning from this aspect of the subject, we may express the hope—nay, more, our assurance—that Elijah, in the better world to which that chariot bore him, has broader vision and deeper insight into spiritual and heavenly forces than he had at Carmel and Horeb. Full proof of this is involved in the fact that about nine hundred years later God sent him down to the Mount of Transfiguration to cheer and comfort the sorrowing and despondent Son of Man; and as he with Moses spake with Him concerning the decease He was to accomplish at Jerusalem, it must have been out of the experiences of his own earthly life that Elijah sought to fortify the human heart of our Saviour, and to assure Him that the Spirit of His God would watch over and keep Him through all the dark and bitter experiences of the coming death,

never to leave His soul in hell nor suffer His Holy One to see corruption. The promise and potency of the resurrection life were demonstrated to our Lord in the persons of these two men; and as Jesus, "the angel who was with Moses in the bush, and with the church in the wilderness," the spiritual rock of His people, had supplied them in the wilderness and afterward with spiritual drink, so now these leaders of that people He had so loved and nurtured came to call these former things to His remembrance, and to assure His heart, oppressed with the heavy task of the world's redemption, and ready to doubt His own strength to abide the awful issue, that the same God who had raised them up would also now raise up His Own Beloved Son. No one of narrow mind, possessed of ignorance and conceit, with any remnant of earthly failings and frailties, could have been selected for such momentous mission; Elijah on the glorious mount had none of these; he had been changed, as we (blessed thought) will also, *in that day*, be changed, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

Let us now see wherefore and wherein this history of Elijah "was written aforetime for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." James has set it forth and summed it up in few words: "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." Elijah, a man of like passions with us, intensely fervent and zealous, but also intensely narrow and self-sufficient, prayed God for the awful visitation of famine; he little knew what he asked for, nor in how wide-reaching measure the

suffering he sought to bring on the guilty followers of Baal was to involve the happiness and lives of faithful thousands in Israel. He knew not of the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and so, culpably ignorant, he made the gross mistake of invoking misery on those multitudes of the innocent and helpless. But God heard the prayer of His earnest but ill-judging servant; He sent the famine, yet He cared for and preserved the seven thousand faithful; His arm was not shortened that it could not save them, even while He was giving full effect to Elijah's prayer. We are not to judge God, and His ability to do, by any human standards; He was able to do for His chosen people then as He is to-day for us, "above all they could ask or think"; He could give full scope to the operation of Elijah's extravagant petition, and yet save harmless the loyal and devoted among the people. The Apostle refers to Elijah's prayer as that of a righteous man, not of a self-righteous but one righteous before God, and declares that such a prayer "availeth much." Elijah's prayer resulted in a line of events he did not anticipate; God worked it out in a totally different way and for higher ends than those Elijah had proposed; for it stands forth one of the most striking episodes in the record of His dealings with men, and is one of those eminently "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come"; so that from it we may safely draw the lesson that our prayers, though offered from erring hearts, dictated by fallible judgment, and expectant of unwarranted results (according to any

human estimate), may yet—yes, *will*—be received and answered. Not in any manner, however, to vindicate our fallacious thought, nor to make Infinite Wisdom wait as a servant on our imperfect minds and wills; but our All-Seeing God brings forth the consummation in His own way and after a manner far above our thought.

Prayer is a gracious boon and a high privilege; but it has fallen into a low estate under the teaching and practice of many in the Christian world; "earnest prayer" is an expression often heard, and too often is spoken as if meaning mere repetition of the same prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a model for brevity, variety, and terseness, and for the all-embracing scope of its themes; from it, as a model, may we not learn that repetition or importunity about the same things is not needful with nor acceptable to our faithful Hearer of prayer? In fact, may we not, in intercourse with God, act by the same plain, clear rules of common sense that actuate us in intercourse with our fellow-men? Business men make the largest transactions by use of the fewest possible words. Two friends meet; an interchange of thought on some subject takes place; it is found that one can render the other some pleasant and easy service; it is asked for, the promise is given, the service is rendered; all this with very few words. In such agreeable ways, ever closely bordering on taciturnity, are all affairs of our social and business life regulated; we understand each other almost intuitively. We may well consider that God, if our lives are such as to endear us to Him, has toward us an understand-

ing equally good, and needing as little speaking on our part; surely, it cannot be required of us to go over the same thing with Him in our prayers time after time. If we were to go to an earthly friend repeatedly about something already discussed once and agreed upon, would he not soon come to think it a sort of persecution, a needless bother, a puerile trifling; and, if continued long, would he not deem it an insulting and wanton doubt of his sincerity? And why should not the case be so with our Heavenly Father, who can understand us and all our thoughts long before we utter them? It should be kept in mind that prayer is treated of in this paper in its most limited and legitimate meaning, as entreaty, supplication; we may often speak with God in secret to tell Him of our loyalty, love, and delight in His service; such intercourse is properly to be termed, not prayer, but communion.

In the summer of the year 1893 there prevailed over a certain district in the State of Indiana a long and severe drought. Two deacons living in that district on farms not far apart, by chance met one morning on the highway and began exchanging views in regard to the weather and the prospect for crops. They agreed that the drought threatened their total destruction, that rain must come soon to secure even a half crop; they agreed that only God could give it, and, if given, it must be in answer to prayer. Remembering that "If two of you shall agree as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father who is in heaven," they knelt down where they were and offered their prayer for the rain to save their own and their

neighbours' crops. Some months before this, there passed over the country a party of prospectors looking for indications of natural gas; on the farm of one of these deacons appearances on the surface seemed to justify a belief in the presence of gas below; so, after an arrangement made with the owner in case of their finding it, they brought on the machinery, erected a derrick, and sank the well. They had bored and driven the pipe by this time far down, but no signs had appeared of the gas, and at length discouraged, they had given up hope and had begun to draw out the pipe; it was slow and tedious work, each successive section coming up with a harder pull; the last length of pipe had been reached and fastened to, but the power of the engine seemed inadequate to loosen it; one last trial was attempted with full pressure of steam, when suddenly there came an upward rush of a black, foul fluid belching out and far up with an energy that overturned the derrick and wrecked the machinery. In a few minutes this fountain ran clear, and was seen to be pure cold water, and it did not cease its outflow night or day. As the country for a wide distance around was quite or nearly flat, with no actively flowing stream to drain it, this water soon covered and flooded it, so that the ungodly and infidel neighbours of these deacons were roundly cursing them on account of their prayers; for this outburst of the water took place on the same day and a few hours *after* the deacons had offered up their prayer; all farms were under water, and what little crop there had seemed a prior promise of

was utterly ruined, drowned out before the hole could be capped over and the fountain brought under control. God does not answer us as we ask, nor by the methods we think He ought to; nothing could have been further from the minds of those deacons than that kind of response from Him; they had asked for rain to save their crops, and a flood had been sent which completely killed them. But those deacons will never need to pray for rain again; with irrigating pipes and channels laid out from that fountain, the crops will never fail for themselves and their children to the remotest generation.

Lastly, let it be said that our prayers must always be offered upon the expressed or tacit condition of subjection to God's will. In this regard our Saviour's prayer in Gethsemane is the one most beautiful and precious example: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." If our Lord had not uttered this last sentence, God would doubtless have answered His prayer and let the cup pass, and thus the world's redemption would have been omitted or postponed! The former case, how awful to contemplate! and in the latter case, to what year or day the redemption would have been postponed, what mortal tongue may tell?

Finally, what ample warrant, what complete assurance have we for using this privilege in fullest measure, to pray without ceasing, to pray and not faint! Do we stop to require further evidence against our doubts on this score? Even that unreasonable demand may be satisfied. In the 5th

and 8th chapters of Revelations, containing the records of one of the visions wherein John saw many themes of the church on earth illustrated by themes of the church above, one scene is portrayed where the throne of The Most High was set, where those four living creatures and four and twenty elders whom God loved best stood nearest to Him and worshipped, offering from golden harps in one hand the songs of the redeemed, and out of golden bowls in the other hand the sweet-odoured prayers of the saints. Rev. v. 8: "And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Rev. viii. 3 and 4: "And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand."

So may we be persuaded that the incense most pleasing and delightful to Him of all that can be offered in heaven or in earth are the prayers of *all* saints; weak as they may be in expression, poor in subject-matter, dictated by erring or foolish motive, lacking in faith, feeble in desire, yet they are preciously cherished and gathered in those golden bowls for God. Around the throne of the King of Kings there may be many shining hosts who, with sweet-toned harps and sweetest voices, pour forth their

anthems of praise and love; yet the prayer uttered in trembling whisper by the lowliest saint of earth goes past their serried ranks to have instant audience in the ear of Heavenly Power, not one feeble tone of it muffled by the resounding chants of celestial choirs; that prayer comes in all its freshness, offered in all its tenderness, as delightful incense to Him who "will look to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at His word."

The coming of God's kingdom waits upon prayer; He made it to be so when He bid us pray, "Thy kingdom come"; if there is apparent delay in that coming, the fault is ours, not His; for He is not slack concerning any of His promises. Our prayers may ascend without measure, freely challenging His ability and will to execute them, until, through prayer and work, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, until His name shall be great among the heathen, and from every place between the rising and the setting sun the priceless incense of prayer, so loved by Him, shall rise to fill the golden bowls. And whether the gladness and triumph of His coming be near at hand or very far off, may we all, in the one church of heaven and earth, whether yet in the battle or gone to our rest, be able to stand up boldly and in good confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming, while He shall then make of Himself the solemn inquiry: "Do I find faith on the earth?"

FIDELITY.

LUKE XVI. 1–13.

THE lesson of the parable, according to the interpretation generally received, is said to be contained in the 9th verse: "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." The application is, that the possessors of money or wealth should make such wise, liberal, and beneficent use of their means as will commend them to those with whom they are to be associated in the life hereafter, when they are to inhabit the "eternal tabernacles." The best disposition for our riches is not to hoard, but wisely to spend them; not to lay them up on earth where moth and thieves may destroy and steal; not to pull down old barns and build new for an increasing store, when the morrow may not find our souls among the living. Wealth is harder to keep than to gain, for it is ever ready to "take to itself wings and fly away as the eagle toward heaven." Give out, therefore, of your riches, exercising a wise beneficence; so you will gain the praise and solid good-will of the good, the loving, and lovable in the better life to come. Such is the lesson conveyed by the parable according to the prevalent exegesis.

But this seems to be but a small outcome from

the great amount of material provided in the eight preceding verses. The acts and words of a rich landlord, of a dishonest steward, and of the debtors conspiring with the steward to cheat the landlord, all are said to work out the sole lesson, "Make to yourselves friends," etc. Here is a cumbrous and useless apparatus provided, as it would seem, for a small result; according to the received interpretation, the record of the steward's unthrift is given in order that men might learn from it to be wise and careful in regard to their eternal interests; and the story of dishonesty is narrated in order that "sons of light" may know how, with the mammon of unrighteousness, to make fit friends for society in that heavenly kingdom where earth and all its fashions have forever passed away. It is all seemingly so unnecessary, this array of landlord, steward, and debtors, to teach the need or desirability of securing friends for companionship in the better life; and it is all so illogical that out of the unfaithfulness, dishonesty, and recklessness of them all should come to us a lesson for using our wealth in gaining friends to "receive" us into the sinless and glorified state of the redeemed.

If the lesson is simply, The right use of wealth, it could have been inculcated with much less profusion of material; what need to put a steward in the story at all? or what need of a dishonest one? why not have simply set forth the rich landlord as himself disposing of his wealth so as to do the most good with it, as the rich fool is set forth in hoarding his, and thus win the praise and esteem of the faithful and worthy friends whose friendship is to

be eternal? He might have been presented in the parable modelled after that good rich man Job, who could say of himself and of the days of his prosperity, "I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil." "I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless and him that had none to help him; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not I searched out." Surely, the lesson from a parable so constructed would come with far greater directness and force through the acts of an honest and benevolent Dives, than it could by this roundabout course through the lying and theft of a faithless servant. There is too much machinery in the parable for such a simple result; if the builder of a marine engine, in place of coupling the crank-rods of the driving pistons directly to the shaft (as is the universal custom), were to connect them to a series of cog-wheels arranged between the crank-rod and the shaft, every one would condemn him for the employment of material which served no good use, but was a needless encumbrance upon the motive power. So, by the current and insufficient exegesis of this parable, there are made to appear more "working parts" than are required for the single lesson given.

It was a besetting weakness in the schools of Jewish divines and expositors to elaborate each insignificant item of a precept or parable, to exaggerate in many parts by an overstrained and hypo-

thetical rendering of terms; but the very opposite of this is to be said regarding the prevalent interpretation of this parable. Here is much matter left totally unused; the steward and the debtors are not, as we may believe, necessary actors, and their characters are most inappropriate for the lesson said to be taught. While, therefore, we may be certain that the Divine Teacher brought in these characters and made them perform these acts for a good, moral purpose and to teach a thorough moral lesson, we may be equally certain that He did not set them forth as offering the least semblance of a model for imitation in our own spiritual life and experience. We would now propose a better exegesis.

The parable is to be regarded as in three parts: the main part being the verses 1–7 inclusive, and the lesson of these seven is contained in verses 10, 11, and 12; the secondary part is in verse 8, with its lesson in verse 9; while another and third part is the summing up and conclusion of all in verse 13. The secondary portion will be first treated of, and verses 8 and 9 which compose it read thus: "And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely; for the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." It has already been seen what, under the ruling exegesis, has been accepted as the teaching of this latter, the 9th verse, but one is struck at once with the badly

disjointed relations such a lesson bears toward all the other teachings having reference to eschatology in the New Testament. That kingdom of our Redeemer which is altogether spiritual in its course from the first dawn of heavenly life in the soul until its final consummation and triumph in the peace and sinlessness of heaven, that kingdom, if we read this interpretation aright, may yet, in a manner, be purchased by our use of the money we possess. We are counselled to regard this verse as containing a command upon us to secure by our money these friends who are to receive us on our arrival in the better world. But who are the "friends"? If they have power to receive, they then must have impliedly the power to reject us; and, in the former case, our salvation depends not upon a Saviour, but upon those whom we have in this manner made our friends.

Attention is also called to the usage of the Greek word δέξωνται, a deponent verb translated "receive." It is believed that careful study of the Greek will show that whenever in the New Testament it is applied to persons, there is always implied, either by the context or by the character or function of the person receiving, his privilege of *choice*, to receive or not to receive; familiar instances are such as: "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me"; "And whosoever shall not receive you nor hear your words," etc.; as Jesus once came to a village of the Samaritans, "they received him not, because his face was as though he were going to Jerusalem." According to this usage,

therefore, in every other place where applied to persons, the inference cannot fairly be avoided that the "friends" in this parable are endowed with choice, and thus with power *not* to receive as well as receive into the "eternal tabernacles"; and no further word is needed here to show the absurdity as well as the impiety of such a doctrine so opposed to our teaching of the Christian belief regarding the future life. *Δέχομαι* is, in New Testament usage, strongly contrasted with *Λαμβάνω;* the former is always conditional in meaning, and is far from conveying any idea of a defined and determinative process or of a fixed, unalterable conclusion in the mind of the agent of whom or of whose acts the verb may be used. But *Λάμβανω,* on the other hand, is employed in all cases where an ordered and positive action is taken as the result of mature experience or settled counsel. But, again, of what sort are the friends? such as we might choose, from all we know, to make them friendly by the use of money? Certainly, under any interpretative method, we must reject the idea of anything in the nature of personal purchase or bribery being intended. The thought is, that the "mammon" must be used in such unselfish, such wisely good and beneficent ways as that we shall gain the approval and high praise of all those unselfish, good, and benevolent who are to meet us in the blessed hereafter; so say the commentators generally accepted as authorities on the parables. But there arise great difficulties here. If the friends are to receive us, they are to go before us, and be on hand at our coming; are we therefore to

make friends only of those advanced in years, and who generally would be most likely to await us there? How can we help making friends among the young as well as the old? nay, how avoid making friends even among bad men and hardened sinners? It is easily conceivable that a faithful Christian, faithfully administering the monetary trust committed to him as the steward of his Lord, may win friends even among the vicious, the worldly, the abandoned in sin; the benevolent are numerous in our day; the Peabodys, Dodges, and Coopers are representatives of an increasing class, and their "friends" are to be reckoned by the thousands in every grade and station of life; even the degraded and basest have no other than words of praise for the careful and liberal benefactions made by such men.

And we may not deny that goodness, apart from wealth, often commands the respect and commendation of the wicked; the homage that vice pays to virtue is often given in the warm approval and high praise of those who have enough of moral judgment to appreciate the holy beauty of virtuous actions, but not enough of moral power or will to imitate them. Surely, no one could wish to be "received" by that class of friends hereafter, for that reception must be only in eternal tabernacles suited to the character of their wicked occupants and utterly unsuited to the children of light. But if it be said that we may make friends only among the good, those whom we know as certain to be in the better and holier world, then how are we to know them? Their inner life is not open to us; only the Lord knoweth them that are His; the kingdom

of God cometh not with observation; we are not omniscient, as we should be if we can say of this or that one, He must be made our friend, because he certainly is to await us in the eternal tabernacles of the good and holy. Yet one of the ablest of our living divines would persuade us of our duty and care specially to select our friends from among the good only, and cultivate their friendship so diligently by the use of our money that they shall "receive" us hereafter. The logic of this reasoning is all incurably lame in its progress, and phenomenally weak in outcome. Our Lord could not have intended so impotent a conclusion for this parable, nor would He have brought all the characters into it and filled it so full of action, only to have drawn from it teaching so vague and dilute in quality.

Having thus noted the objections to the current and defective explanation of this passage, let us turn to what is believed to be a better and sound solution. These 8th and 9th verses offer only a secondary or side lesson. After the words of the 7th verse have been spoken our Teacher pauses before giving the application contained in the 10th, 11th, and 12th verses, and fixing the attention of His hearers upon the last official act of the steward, makes it the occasion for a lesson to the sons of light, prefacing it with the expression, "And I say unto you." There is no particular stress to be laid on these words here; there is no special emphasis to be attached to them, as there should be if preceded by the "Verily, verily" He used at other times; but He utters this expression to call off attention for the moment from the steward, the

landlord, the debtors, and the sons of this world, and fix the thoughts of His hearers upon this lesson to be drawn from a minor subject, aside from the main topic, but naturally suggested by it. It was as if He had said in the terms familiar to us in modern speech, "By the way, while on this subject, and before applying my parable, let me say to you, sons of light, be like sons of this world in making friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; for as sons of light you can wisely do with your own in an honest way what the sons of this world do with what is not their own in a dishonest and selfish way." The teaching of these two verses has therefore reference to the making of friends in and for this life only, and not with regard to the future life.

One beneficent result of the Universalist controversy has been to demonstrate it as true that the validity of the doctrine of endless punishment is not to be established by the meaning of one certain word in our Greek Testament. The word *αἰώνιος* does in the greater number of its uses, yet does not always and everywhere, convey the idea of limitless duration; and whether it shall have the meaning "eternal" or "everlasting," or shall mean a period limited and less than these words imply, depends entirely upon the connection in which it is used. There are many passages in the New Testament establishing the possibility or certainty of eternal loss for a human soul just as conclusively as those passages in which the Greek *αἰώνιος* is used, and they might be quoted here were it not aside from our present purpose. That

word, as used here, does not signify endless duration; for in the connection with other words of the sentence it has simply its original and primary meaning, "Life-Long." * In primitive usage it meant "pertaining to the history of a tribe during its successive generations"; it implied a determinate measure of existence for either an individual or a generation, which might have been extended, but not limitless. In our Saviour's day it was used in both its limited and unlimited sense, and we are therefore at liberty to construct a lesson from His teaching in this instance upon either meaning of the word; but as it has been shown impossible for reference to a future life to be here

* This paper was written and completed early in the winter of 1895-6. In the *North American Review* for April, 1896, the following passage appears in the course of a long and ably written article by Mr. Gladstone:

We first become acquainted not with *aionios*, but with *aion*, so far back as in Homer. It is used eight times in the "Iliad" and five in the "Odyssey"; most commonly, it is the simple equivalent of the Latin "vita" and the English "life," relative to a man. Occasionally, it means the heart or flower of life, especially in the address of Andromache to the dead Hector: ἄνερ, ἀπ ἀἰῶνος νέος ἀγκεω. Here the effect of ἄἰῶνος is that Hector (who was undoubtedly in his prime) is cut away not only from life, but from the flower of life. The clause in Psalm cii. 22, comes near it—"Take me not away *in the midst* of my days."

We come next in classical Greek to the adjective *aionios*. But the Homeric use of the word shows vividly that the word is essentially relative rather than absolute. It is the *aion* of somebody or something; not abstract, not an exact counterpart of *mors* or of the English "death." With lapse of time comes a modification of the sense; and the meanings are given for it, lasting for an age, perpetual, everlasting, eternal. In

intended, it follows that the precept of Jesus refers solely to the making of friends during and for our present earthly life.

In fact, the word "eternal" is often used at this present time and in our English forms of speech with limited and restricted meaning. We speak (for illustration) of the eternal mountains and the everlasting hills; yet we know it as a literal fact that they are not to endlessly endure, since in belief of the Divine Word we know that the earth is one day to be wrapped up and destroyed in universal fire. How easily and suddenly that great day of God may be brought on can be very readily perceived when we understand a certain

the Nomoi of Plato, the Maker forms the human being to be *ἀνωλεθρον . . . ἀλλ' οὐκ ἄιώνιον, ψυχήν και σῶμα, καθάπερ οἱ κατά νόμου οντες θέοι*, where the distinctions seem to be taken between survival and immortality; our soul survives the death we know of, but death never comes at all to the acknowledged gods, who have an indefectible existence. But I have not seen in classical Greek any use of either the adjective or the substantive for eternity in the abstract, if we take the distinction between an expanse of time, to which no particular limit is attached, and a substantive eternity, consisting of time ceaselessly prolonged. Mr. De Quincey, who was both scholar and philosopher, has written a paper on this word, and he says, apparently with much truth: "The exact amount of the duration expressed by our aeon depends altogether upon the particular subject which yields the aeon." It is "the duration or cycle of existence which belongs to any object . . . in right of its genus." (Hogg's "De Quincey and His Friends," pp. 308, 312.) An approximate rendering of the word *aionios* is perhaps to be found in "life-long." If this be the sense of Scripture, then the phrase as used in the parable of Matthew xxv. simply throws us back upon the question—What is the ordained life of the soul?

fact well established as such in the views of our advanced scientists. The element of oxygen, supporter of all forms of life, is also the producer and supporter of fire, that great enemy of all earthly life; and it is the one enormously abundant and pervading element of earth and air. With but very few exceptions, and in proportions varying with each, it enters into every constituent of this globe; it is present in all minerals, earths, waters, in every form of animal and vegetable life; it combines with every other element in ratios undeviating with each particular one. Yet, to say that these proportions are regulated by natural laws is only the same as to say that they are so fixed by the power of Him at whose fiat those laws were at first ordained, and "without Whom was not anything made that was made"; and they continue in force only by authority of the same divine Son of God, Who is ever "upholding all things by the word of His power." Let that divine upholding cease for an instant, and, by a new fiat from our Enthroned Saviour, let new proportions be given for the combination of oxygen with all other substances, and, in most cases, but little in excess of those ratios now in force, and we can see how quickly the great cataclysm would come, "when the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Then would continents, seas, forests, mountains, and rivers be no more; for under this renovation by fire we, the beneficiaries of His promises, would "look for new heavens and

new earth, a dwelling-place for righteousness." The word "eternal" had often a limited meaning also in the Hebrew tongue. The Psalmist sings of the heavens and the earth, that "the Lord hath made them fast for ever and ever, and hath given them a decree which shall not pass"; yet other passages in the Psalms and Prophets declare that the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, and that the earth and heavens shall wax old and be changed as a vesture, while God shall be the same and His years shall have no end. Thus do we of this day use the word "eternal" in a figurative rather than in its literal sense, and in like manner it was here employed by our Lord to designate the tabernacles, not as the ever-enduring and transmundane abodes of the righteous, but as the homes and dwelling-places of this earth.

There is also a peculiar fitness in the use of the term *αἰώνιος* as applied to the *σκηνάς*; this will appear from the short study now to be made of this latter term, together with *οἴκους*, in the 4th verse. *Οἶκος*, while often applied to mean a constructed dwelling, yet does in its most numerous applications denote the members of a household collectively, and that whether they are of one generation or several. Joseph went with Mary to Bethlehem to be taxed because he was of the *οἴκος* and lineage of David (Luke ii. 4). *Οἰκία* has reference, in all but one of its uses in the New Testament, to the material construction serving as an abode for the several occupants constituting the *οἶκος*. The steward, therefore, in anticipation of the results of what he was about to do, had it in view

to be received into the *οἴκους*, rather than into the *οἰκίας*; that is, he would gain the cordial goodwill of those in authority over the dwellings, knowing that then entertainment must necessarily follow and be secured to him, in common with all other inmates of the *οἶκος*. Thus the steward, a son of this world, dealing with the debtors, also sons of this world, and with no thought other than the sordid one of securing himself during this life against beggary and starvation, employs the term in ordinary use, *οἴκους*, to indicate the full extent to which his expectations of a comfortable and easy future have reached. But in contrast to these sons of this world, when we come to the 9th verse, our Lord speaks not of *οἴκους*, but of *σκηνάς*, a word indicating originally booths or temporary shelters of boughs; then it was applied to tents or tabernacles, but these were also of a movable character. Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration proposed to build three tabernacles there, something easily and quickly done with branches from the forests near at hand. In the arrangements of the Attic theatre the word *σκηνή* originally denoted the booth to which the actor retired between his performances; afterward it was applied at successive periods to (1) the stage buildings as a whole, (2) the wall at the back of the stage, (3) the decoration or painted scenery in front of the back wall, (4) the stage, and (5) the theatre in a general sense; but in the first century of the Christian era it had not received any of these five latter applications.

Our Lord therefore could have used the word

strictly and only in its original meaning, and very appropriately too, for He was not speaking to sons of this world, but to the sons of light; and for these latter no habitation of this world should ever be aught more than a *σκηνή*, never an *οἶκος*. Having here no continuing city, but seeking one to come, their earthly dwelling-place, however substantially constructed, must be for them only a *σκηνή*. The only *οἶκος* of enduring value or permanence was that of His Heavenly Father, in which were the mansions (*μονας:* from *μένω*) that He would prepare, and which would remain theirs forever. In the light of this use of the word *σκηνάς* it is seen how appropriately the adjective *αἰωνίους* is prefixed, not as having the meaning "eternal," but as simply derived from and of cognate signification with the noun *αἰώνος* in the 8th verse. It is in speaking of *αἰώνος τουτοῦ*, of this world, that the sons of light are to regard the *αἰωνίους σκηνάς*, the life-long, perishable, worldly tabernacles, as their only fit and fleeting habitations. They have no *οἶκος* here other than the *οἶκος* of this perishing *σκηνή*, and when that shall be dissolved they are to have an *οἰκοδομή* of God, an *οἰκία* not made with hands (2 Cor. v. 1.). Thus did this topical use of *αἰωνίους* easily suggest itself to our Divine Teacher as naturally following upon the use of *αἰώνος*, both noun and adjective having the same reference. Other cases occur where our Lord used a word cognate in meaning as well as in form with one He had just before uttered, thus: "Thou art *πέτρος*, and upon this *πέτρα* I will build my church."

In this view a simple solution is given of the parable, and a plain application of this secondary lesson. We are so to use all advantages afforded us by the mammon of unrighteousness in every good way, for every wise and righteous end, that, during our time of prosperity such friends shall be made as shall be in sympathy with our good acts, our good character, our earnest purpose to glorify the Lord whose stewards we are; thus, when our riches take to themselves wings and fly away, there will be friends remaining gladly willing to care for and "receive" us into their houses. What the corrupt and dishonest steward, a son of this world, did for himself in a wretchedly dishonest way, we, the sons of light, walking and doing always as sons of light, are to do with pure hearts in an honest way and with no thought of self and with no selfish purpose. That divine altruism which leads us ever to "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others," and is itself a faithful reflection of the Divine Love, will soon win its way to appreciative hearts of the unselfish and good, and so their friendship is sure to be ours in the time of adversity. This is a precept spoken, like some others by our Lord, for our profit in a material sense, and to serve for our advantage in this earthly life; it recalls one similar, spoken in the Sermon on the Plain: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." The precept is general, not special, in application.

"Give" is a general command, and the return is also to be general; *it* shall be given you. Generous conduct and a gracious manner of life will win men without self-seeking on our part. "What can I do for you?" is the question very commonly and not unmeaningly heard in our day when two friends meet, each appreciating the other, and by this question offering a tribute of regard for his honourable and generous disposition. Such is the very practical lesson taught in these two verses; friends thus made through our fidelity in the use of mammon will "receive" us willingly, lovingly into their houses when that mammon shall fail, and to us the experience of the Psalmist will be verified, "I have been young and now am old, yet never saw I the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging their bread."

The solution of the parable is thus made easy by the right rendering of one word; for, under the supposed necessity of attaching a meaning of unlimited duration to the term *αἰώνιος*, the exegesis has been of a distorted, unnatural, and inconclusive character; while, with the interpretation here proposed, all appearances of distortion and unsymmetry pass away, and the whole parable, with its main lesson, its secondary or side lesson, and its concluding application, offers a didactic result entirely consistent, harmonious, and natural. It also establishes the Greek syntax as correct, and the forms of the words *ὅταν* and *ἐκλίπῃ* and *δέξωνται* as right and properly expressive of the thought; the mammon we possess may or may not fail in this life, as the adverb and the verb signify;

and the friends may or may not receive us into their houses, as the verb δέχομαι by usage implies, and properly makes that reception conditional as depending upon the good-will and kindness of friends.

And now may be taken up the main lesson, which, under this new exposition and separate solution of the 8th and 9th verses, becomes quite clear in its reasoning and results. A rich landlord, a negligent and eventually dishonest steward, and debtors conspiring to cheat a creditor, these are the persons in the parable; but the principal interest centres in the steward, who begins with wasting only, but ends with theft; for that is the right name for his act, even if technically and legally he was not to be held guilty, and did not actually appropriate any goods for himself; for if he had stolen anything, the course was at once open to his lord to recover the property, prove the theft, and then deliver him to the officer for imprisonment or crucifixion. Thus the steward, beginning with a little negligence and relaxing just a little in the care and oversight he should have exercised in his office, has passed from each degree of laxity to the next worse degree, until the shameful report of him, now great in volume, comes to the ear of his lord. Unprepared for the sudden arraignment, when he comes to consider the answer to his own question, "What shall I do?" he finds that his easy life of negligence and unthrift has unfitted him for earning an honest living; physically, he is from weakness of body unable to dig; morally, he is from pride unable to beg.

He had dallied along that indefinite line where a little cessation from watchfulness and care had become the imperceptible beginning of unfaithfulness to his lord; until now, confirmed in habits of sloth and carelessness, he can find no way to provide against want for the future, except by committing some essentially dishonest practices. It had therefore become easy for him, and would but little disturb his dulled conscience, to conspire in defrauding the lord in such a manner as to lay the debtors under obligation to him for the immense advantages they would gain by the fraud; for he was yet steward, with complete control of affairs, having the same autocratic and unassailable right over them that the principal himself would have. And now his lord having come at a time when he looked not for him, and at an hour when he was not aware, to require the account of his stewardship, and with every avenue to an honest living closed against him through his own fault, his only recourse is in connivance at wholesale plunder for the sake of obtaining a livelihood; and his fate at last is to be a pensioner by sufferance upon the debtors whom, by a rascally act in common with them, he has benefited. The parable deals no further with these debtors, but in us who read it there arises a strong curiosity (supposing this had been a real history) to know how it would have turned out at last with the steward; whether he would have continued to the end of his life to enjoy the fruits of his rascality, or whether the benefits gained by the debtors through those swindles, having become exhausted (or even if not exhausted during the

steward's lifetime), they turned him out in the street to end his days at last in beggary. Unprincipled men, making gain by such sordid methods, are apt to figure closely and act with just as little honour toward the poor tool through whom they received their gain as they have acted toward his principal.

There was no long interval between the steward's "What shall I do?" and his "I am resolved what to do." That "logic of events," which in modern times has been made the occasion and excuse for many unrighteous acts by all sorts and conditions of men, was in this steward's case altogether of convincing and resistless force. The plea made by many a modern thief and tramp, "A man must live, and the world owes me a living," is the same in effect as that used by the steward, "that they may receive me into their houses." So was he at the last unrighteous in much, as he had been at the first unfaithful in the least. The lesson of this main part of the parable has now become plain: Whoso sets his heart only on the things of this life, is always looking out for self, is concerned only about having a good and easy time; he must, in the end, turn out either a rascal or a beggar; the unselfish prosper because they make friends by constant and consistent practice of unselfishness; the selfish come to disgrace or want because by ungenerous practices they have alienated and repelled those who would have always been their friends, and in time of adversity their helpers. Thus is selfishness the root and origin of unfaithfulness, and in this short statement may be comprised the whole history of the steward.

Nor is the rich landlord a very admirable character. True, he was of open disposition and generous; he still treated the steward kindly after the evil report was come, gave him space to clear himself if he could, and, pending that, kept him still in office, apparently on the principle that he should be held as innocent until properly proved to be guilty; yet he shows himself to be a son of this world, for the villainy being accomplished, he has no word of regret over the result; chagrin and anger are repressed, and in sympathy with the conscienceless spirit of the money-grabbing sons of the world, he has only words of admiration for the exceeding acuteness and adroitness of the rascal who, in betrayal of his trust, has made for him so great a loss. We can imagine the rich man ending his contemplation of the case by repeating to himself a phrase closely akin to that idiotic saying so common in this day, prominent in popular literature and of frequent use in the conversation of reckless and selfish men, "Nothing succeeds like success."

There is a law of fidelity in the kingdom of God; and of all methods for testing character and showing the true fibre and temper of a man's soul, his acts and ways in regard to the mammon of unrighteousness offer the most keen and searching, for the temptations are of the strongest and most subtle sort. Consider what this mammon really is in the ultimate analysis. If it had been made a law of our physical and moral nature that no man should ever be able to earn by his labour more than would suffice for shelter, clothes, and food, there never would have been in use in any lan-

guage such terms as wealth, capital, savings, treasure, temples, banks, railroads; for the objects represented by these terms would have no existence. But the law being that a man can produce more than he can consume, the result is that little savings soon aggregate into wealth or capital, and that, by another natural law, this capital (which is only labour in a concentrated form) is gained and controlled by the more intelligent, careful, and prudent of the human family. All the riches of the world now existing, wherever and in whatever form—in metal, in houses, in temples, banks, railroads, or in any other work of man—represent simply the accumulated and undestroyed labour, both that now being produced and that inherited from all ages of the world. And because this wealth can be so easily, and therefore has been so generally made subservient to the lusts and vices of mankind, and has been almost universally perverted from the good and beneficent uses it should have been made to serve, it has been fitly termed the "mammon of unrighteousness," and the faithful servant of God, when put in possession of that mammon, will never lack opportunity, through the temptations to evil that it offers, for full proof of his citizenship in that kingdom which "is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful," and if he has not been faithful in this unrighteous mammon given in his charge for a test of his fidelity, he has not become fitted for any higher trust, and cannot have the care or use of those spiritual treasures of high-

est and enduring value that are to survive the chance and change of this life of probation.

Then, again, this mammon is "another's"; it is not our own either to use for self, to waste, to steal or suffer others to steal. In the false jargon of the world it may be called ours, we may be said to be worth so much, the lands may be called after our own names, and the sons of men give us the praise for gaining all these things, and honour us highly while keeping them in possession, and from such we should never get even a hint that they are not wholly ours and ours forever. But for us thus to do and live as owners, and not as stewards for the Divine Owner, would constitute a betrayal of our trust, and demonstrate that we are unfit to receive "that which is our own." The love, devotion, care, and solicitude called into exercise through patient continuance in a wise administration of our Master's goods are just the qualities to fit us rightly to administer our own, both in this life and in that to come; because "our own," in either life, comprises none of the tangible, outward, material objects of sense or sight, but spiritual attainments gained through strivings and inner experiences, through victories over sin and self, through the spirit of honour, honesty, and love made regnant in our lives and triumphant by the grace of Him Who hath overcome and is seated upon His Father's throne.

There is a progression of the argument in these 10th, 11th, and 12th verses. 1st: Fidelity in the least can alone make possible fidelity in much, and unfaithfulness in the least inevitably brings about

unfaithfulness in much. 2d: Fidelity in the unrighteous mammon, which is the "least," renders one fit for the trust of that which is "true" riches. 3d: All that we have here is not ours, but another's; to Him Who has bought us with a price belong our every earthly possession, our every spiritual and mental endowment. In this day of probation we are actually owners of nothing; all we are, all we have, is upon trust; but with that day past, we enter into the enjoyment of "our own," acquired through many a hard spiritual strife, through much tribulation, watching, and prayer; called no more to be servants, but made unto our God kings and priests, we will enter upon that incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance which, through the precious strivings of God's grace within, has been made our own.

And now to take up the 13th verse, in which we have a general summing up of the lessons of the parable. "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The effective element in all true service is love toward him whom we serve, whether that one be a divine or a human person. And there can be no middle nor any indifferent ground between love and hate. "He will love or he will hate" is the truth and rule declared by our Lord concerning all servants rendering service of every sort, whether earthly or heavenly. Into all true service, therefore, there enters a consideration above that of mere compensation on the ground of justice, right, and equity.

We are not to serve for so much, and make the measure of our service rigidly conformable to the letter of the contract, careful to make it no more than what the measure of the recompense is to be; we are to go beyond justice and right, and render more value in service than what our mere "pay" amounts to. For what is love in its outward and practical manifestation but the continual giving of our best in words and deeds and to an unbounded measure? And the servant, if he be true, must come under this law of love. Even in our own day, and under the hard conditions established between employers and employed, this law must prevail; for the workman who will not exercise more labour, more care and diligence for the benefit of his employer than are absolutely required under the strict letter of his contract, and who will not show a disinterested desire that his work shall be economically and thoroughly done, becomes thereby disqualified not only for future higher service, but even for use in his present position. There must be fully apparent in motive and act that conscientious concern for the interests of his employer which has its origin in a sentiment closely akin to that of love; there should be a self-forgetful absorption in his work to make it always the best possible, and altogether without reference to the rate of the pay he is to receive.

And, on the other hand, the employer to whom his employed are bound by no other tie than that of exact recompense for their work, and who will not endeavour to adjust their mutual relations upon some better lines than the hard ones of lowest pay

practicable for best work, will soon find that he is earning the costly hate rather than the profitable love of his men, and that he is getting no true service in the work thus done, not "upon honour," but, as it were, by compulsion; if, in the hard grind of his selfish system, he takes no personal interest in the man who, through the pure motive of fidelity in his work, will give more value in labour and care than are agreed upon, then such an employer has mistaken his own best interests, and deserves to fail in the end. But he should always treat his men upon such lines of appreciative kindness and fairness as to deserve that love, or that respect and deference next to love, without which, in all the inequalities divinely ordained for this present life, no service can be rendered or received with mutual profit. Thus, with all the light and wisdom flooding our twentieth century now at hand, we yet live in barbarian darkness when that living is founded upon precepts or laws of purely equal service and recompense, upon mere justice and right, and not, rather, upon the all-powerful law of love. God is love, and His power is exerted omnipotently in all and upon all from that one impulse, love. Love upholds the universe because it is utterly and continually patient toward all the wrong done in it; let, for a moment, any rule simply of justice or equity control, and the guilty earth would go back to chaos and destruction.

The real cause of the unfaithfulness of the steward was in his lack of love for his lord; if he had loved him, then a natural and tender consideration for his master's interests would have stricken him

with grief for his fault, would have led him to frankly confess it, to implore forgiveness, and promise an honest and careful service for the future. But the hollowness of all service without love is fully demonstrated by his case, in that he thinks not for a moment of such a course. In his "What shall I do?" there is no intimation of the least sorrow for his wrong-doing, nor the slightest hint of any purpose to change his manner of life or manner of service. With that desperate hardness of the wicked man who is ever impelled still to follow a further wicked course by mere force of the guilt already incurred, he declares, "I am resolved what to do," and thus indicates the hard, unhesitating selfishness of his heart, and the thinly-veiled hate he really entertained toward his lord. For, if any love, even the least, had been in him, it would seem so natural to us that he, like the servant who owed his lord ten thousand talents, should fall down at his feet and cry, "Forgive me, have patience with me, try me yet a little further and I will serve thee faithfully." Thus is the grand lesson illustrated to us, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Love for God is the essential condition of service for Him; we cannot serve if we do not love; and if we love we cannot help serving Him. On the other hand, if we love mammon, we must serve that and hate God; there is no possible alternative, and the word of God, which can never pass away, hath declared it. Thus love and service mutually prove and establish each other; the golden thread of this doctrine can be easily traced through the web and woof woven by

many writers. Paul writes: "Faith worketh by love"; James writes: "A man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works; show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith." Faith and love are one; where one is the other must be, and true service is the outcome of both or either.

Then why, O Blessed Jesus Christ,
  Should I not love Thee well,
Not for the hope of winning Heaven,
  Nor of escaping hell?
Not with the hope of gaining aught,
  Nor seeking a reward,
But as Thyself hast loved me,
  O ever-loving Lord!

By this new exegesis it is believed there is obtained a most natural solution of this parable; there are no superfluous persons in the drama, and there is no unnecessary action by any of them; there is nothing brought in not needed for illustration of the lessons intended to be taught; and those are clear, of high spiritual import, and in perfect harmony with all other teachings of our Lord.